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3 April 2018

Mr Jeremy Hallum  
Heathlands Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, West Bergholt  
New Church Road  
West Bergholt  
Colchester  
Essex  
CO6 3JF

Dear Mr Hallum,

### **Short inspection of Heathlands Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, West Bergholt**

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in October 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You, your leaders and governors provide clear direction, which creates a strong sense of community and purpose, which motivates staff and pupils to achieve very well. Leaders and governors make good use of external validation and provide detailed plans to secure continual improvement. Parents and staff alike recognise the very high quality of leadership in your school.

During the previous inspection, many strengths were identified, including: leadership; the strong subject knowledge of teachers and their skills in questioning; the quality of provision and the good start that children make in the early years; the excellent results that children achieve in their phonics screening check; the strong progress pupils make in reading and mathematics; the knowledge and commitment to improvement demonstrated by your governors; the support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities; spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and pupils' exemplary behaviour. These all remain strengths.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have maintained very strong outcomes for

pupils. The large majority of pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils make strong progress and, as a result, in all subjects, many achieve standards above those expected for their age. In all key stage assessments and all nationally assessed subjects, a greater proportion of pupils achieve expected standards than is the case nationally. Despite this good performance, you and your leaders are ambitious to increase further the progress that pupils make.

You continue to offer a broad topic-based curriculum, which interests and inspires pupils, allowing them a degree of influence over the direction of their learning. The school's approach to teaching and learning makes good use of exploring real situations and problems. Teachers plan lessons which engage pupils. During the inspection, I saw well-planned, challenging and exciting lessons. For example, a Year 2 class experimented with different materials to ascertain which materials best insulate an ice cube in water to slow down melting. Pupils were encouraged to hypothesise and test, making use of scientific methods, and then record their findings.

Pupils are articulate, polite and well mannered. They listen well and respect other people's ideas. Their attitudes to learning are extremely positive. Pupils understand well and strive to use the school's learner qualities, which are an integral part of daily life in Heathlands school. Pupils are excited and highly motivated by learner characteristic stickers and awards that recognise their achievements. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities and exercise democratic choices. They spoke about performing duties, for example being representatives on the school council, eco committee members, subject learning leaders and members of the worship team, who plan and lead assemblies and church services. Pupils also said that they enjoy the very wide range of sports, clubs, trips and special events that are on offer. They are also inspired by their close links with your partner school in Kenya.

Parents talked of how the school's approach to learning and well-being has helped their children to become more independent and more confident in their learning and of the efforts the school makes to support them in helping their children to learn. A number of parents of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities commented on the excellent provision for their children and the rapid progress they are making.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. As the safeguarding lead, you place a high priority on keeping pupils safe and staff being vigilant at all times. You check that records are detailed and accurate. All staff and governors receive regular training updates and know how to alert leaders to any concerns that they have. Visitors are provided with the necessary information should they have a concern. You work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe and families are well supported. Where there have been concerns, you have been tenacious in following these through. Pre-employment checks and records on staff are comprehensive to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. You take all aspects of health and safety seriously and there is good provision for pupils

who have medical needs. Governors make regular checks on all aspects of safeguarding and health and safety. Pupils said that they feel safe in school. Staff and parents who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, agreed that their children are safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- In your previous inspection report, inspectors recognised that in most lessons pupils were making very good progress because of very good teaching; however, they asked that leaders further improve teaching, by providing suitable staff development opportunities. They also asked leaders to ensure greater challenge for pupils, by encouraging them to be more engaged with their own learning. During the inspection, I met with teachers and teaching assistants to discuss what opportunities they are given to develop their practice. They are highly complementary about the guidance and support they are offered by you and senior colleagues. They value the many opportunities they have to work with other colleagues in the school, the local area and through being part of specialist training programmes. School staff have also supported improvements in other schools.
- You and your leaders regularly observe teaching and monitor pupils' work, and staff are highly appreciative of the thoughtful, precise and challenging feedback which they receive. All staff feel that they are valued, challenged and encouraged to improve. This is clear in responses that staff made to the Ofsted online questionnaire.
- Leaders and governors have invested significant resources in providing well-chosen programmes for teaching and learning, some in collaboration with other schools. Leaders have ensured that all staff are fully trained and that such programmes have been implemented fully and consistently. You have renewed, implemented and systematically monitored the school assessment and feedback policy, so that it is now used well by pupils to improve their own work. As a result, it is manageable, clear and very well understood by staff, pupils and parents. In pupils' work which I looked at with your leaders, we noted that, across all year groups, the implementation of school policy is entirely consistent, and in lessons pupils routinely improve their own work, including in writing.
- All pupils, even in early years, have their own challenge targets, which they are responsible for recording in engaging and age-appropriate ways. For example, in Reception, children move their photograph to the target they are working on, and, in key stage 1, they complete target train carriages. In the upper school, pupils keep their own record sheets. Children are able to explain what they are working on and refer to these in lessons and with each other. From Reception, pupils are encouraged to understand and use the school's six key learning behaviours. These help to develop their capabilities as learners. Pupils with whom I spoke talked of how much this approach has developed their confidence and their ability to tackle more challenging work. Pupils are proud that they take an equal role in progress discussions during parents' evenings.
- All teaching I observed with you during the inspection showed that teachers plan interesting and challenging lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants

demonstrate significant skills in delivery of lessons, for example the skill with which they demonstrate what is expected and plan challenging work which meets the needs of their pupils. All lessons have success criteria set at several levels, and pupils, with guidance if needed, select their appropriate level of challenge. There is very effective use of teaching assistants to support pupils who need extra help and to challenge the most able pupils.

- I also looked at the actions that school leaders have taken to ensure that pupils make rapid progress in writing between key stages 1 and 2. Although pupils in the school achieve better than pupils nationally by the end of key stage 2, in writing the progress they made from key stage 1 in 2017 was not as strong as in reading and mathematics. I also investigated whether the very good test results achieved in grammar, spelling and punctuation are being used to support equally good outcomes in writing. Leaders recognise this and have ensured that pupils are provided with clear models of good writing. This is a principle that begins in early years and continues throughout the school. During my visit, I saw Reception Year children writing at length about the journey from egg to chick, excited by the imminent hatching of chicks in their classroom. There is close attention in early years to providing activities which develop the physical capabilities that children need to write successfully.
- In key stages 1 and 2, leaders have implemented a very clearly structured sequence for teaching writing, which is consistently employed and very effective. Teachers use interesting, high-quality texts as examples to demonstrate and to really help pupils to understand how writers select their words and compose their texts. This is helping pupils to understand how to write well themselves. For example, Year 6 pupils had studied William Wallace's speech to the troops, and watched a section of 'Braveheart'. They analysed what makes the speech powerful and its effect on the listener and had begun to craft their own speeches, for performance aloud. This produced some excellent writing. After each piece of assessed writing, pupils are set very specific targets, which are always followed up by teaching staff, and they are moved on to new targets as quickly as possible. Teaching of writing is now being very closely linked to applying pupils' strong grammar knowledge.
- In some subjects other than English, pupils have regular opportunities to write at length. These pieces of writing are taught explicitly, as in English, and are marked as a piece of writing as well as for the subject-specific qualities. Consequently, the benefits of reinforcing and practising the skills being learned in English are maximised, and pupils are developing a strong body of writing for different purposes and covering a wide range of topics. These could, however, be planned more systematically across subjects to strengthen writing further in foundation subjects. Across subjects, pupils make good use of a variety of classroom resources to work independently on their writing.
- During the inspection, I looked at pupils' writing with leaders and saw that it is progressing very strongly as they move through the school. This is supported by the school's assessment information. Pupils are keen to improve their work as a result of feedback from adults and peers and through self-editing, as they write and present it well. Spelling is still weaker than other aspects of writing. Pupils attempt to check their own spelling, and spelling errors are sometimes identified

by teachers, but there is no obvious consistent approach to the correction and teaching of spelling outside of phonics and set word lists.

- Finally, in the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to improve the use of the outdoor environment in early years. Leaders have made good use of external specialist advice to make improvements in this area. The outdoor environment now offers a stimulating and flexible space, which is thoughtfully adapted to provide challenges and experiences. For example, during the inspection, I observed pupils building large nests from construction items and small nests from Numicon and calculating the number of chicks they could fit in. I also watched children experimenting with water containers and gradients to wash eggs down an open pipe. The outdoor area has many opportunities for writing, and mathematics and is a popular choice with children.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- writing continues to improve by:
  - adopting a more consistent approach to the correction of spelling
  - planning more systematically for the teaching of writing skills across all curriculum subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Sutton  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, parents, governors and pupils and spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- I visited classrooms and looked at pupils' work. I observed behaviour around the school.
- I reviewed the school's website and documents, including curriculum plans, the single central record, child protection systems, the school's self-evaluation and external evaluations, improvement plans, management monitoring information, pupil assessments and progress information.
- I took account of the 135 responses by parents, 51 responses from staff and 115 responses from pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaires, as well as 129 comments from parents by text.