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Mrs Clare Griffiths  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Griffiths

### **Short inspection of Dunmow St Mary's Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 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 June 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. However, the number of staff changes have caused an element of instability over the last three years. In addition, significant changes to your leadership team have made the last year particularly challenging.

You were understandably disappointed with the Year 6 published pupil outcomes for the end of 2017 in reading and mathematics. Attainment for both subjects was below national expectations and the progress pupils made in mathematics was well below the national average. You have, rightly, been reflective when considering the school's priorities and have made sure that the school's development plan accurately identifies what needs to be done to improve pupil outcomes. You and your governors are using this plan to secure school improvement effectively. Governors are very knowledgeable and bring a wealth of expertise, skills and passion to their roles. Governors use these skills and attributes to provide you with well-judged support and challenge. As a result, you have established a committed workforce and a strong leadership team, which are having a significant impact on improving pupil achievement.

You are successfully building on the good practice and outcomes reflected in Reception and key stage 1. Pupils in early years and key stage 1 achieved well at the end of 2017 in reading, writing and mathematics. Current children and pupils are confident in their application of phonics. For example, Reception children apply their early phonics knowledge well and are able to write simple sentences based on

the sounds they know. Year 1 pupils are motivated to write, at length, stories inspired by their topic and class book. Children in Reception and pupils in key stage 1 make good and better progress in reading and writing from their individual starting points. In addition, writing is a strength across the school, with pupils attaining above national expectations at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2017.

Dunmow St Mary's is a vibrant happy place. Pupils told me they enjoy school and a number of pupils said, 'I love it'. Attendance remains above national averages and persistent absence is low. Pupils' behaviour is good. They demonstrated excellent attitudes to learning in all lessons I visited.

Leaders, including governors, and staff share your vision to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics by providing a rich, broad, purposeful and inspiring curriculum. Your carefully planned curriculum is evidenced throughout the school. Displays of pupils' good-quality art work and writing decorate corridors and are of exceptionally good quality. Pupils spoke with pride about their contributions to displays and could confidently explain the learning behind them. For example, pupils were able to explain in detail how they make progress in their art work, using different mediums and methods. Year 5 pupils enthusiastically explained how they enjoyed the Victorian topic and the differences compared with today's society. They could talk about art in relation to William Morris and they proudly showed me their own examples. Year 4 pupils were eager to share their investigations in science. They explained how they were testing the best conditions that enable plants to grow and the impact of sugar on teeth. One pupil spoke in detail about Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution.

Many parents and carers commented positively on the learning opportunities you and your staff provide for their children. One commented: 'I would like to praise the school for the amazing creative curriculum which it provides. The topics are fun, interesting and cover different skills. The effort the teachers go to to 'hook' the children in is amazing and much appreciated.'

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of you and your staff. One parent summed up the views of many by saying, 'I have a very happy child at this school who has made good progress. The whole-child ethos has been hugely important in creating a happy and well-rounded child. A super school.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Checks on all employees' suitability to work with children are complete. Your systems for recording pupil concerns ensure that they are followed up in a timely fashion. An overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View agree that their children are safe and well looked after at the school.

Your secure systems ensure that all incidents regarding pupil behaviour are followed up immediately and appropriate actions taken. Pupils are well cared for at Dunmow St Mary's. Pupils' well-being is at the heart of the school and you have made sure

there are rigorous systems in place to help keep pupils safe. Learning mentors are trained to support particularly vulnerable pupils who may find school challenging. The pastoral team ensures that vulnerable pupils and those who have complex needs are supported well so that they can access a curriculum which meets their individual needs.

## **Inspection findings**

- In order to ascertain whether the school remained good, my key lines of enquiry focused on two main areas: reading and mathematics. In 2017, pupil attainment and progress in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 were too low. From our discussions, it was clear that there were common issues that impacted on both reading and mathematics during 2017.
- You, your senior leaders and governors set to work immediately, unpicking the reasons for pupils' underachievement last year, both in reading and mathematics. Although attainment in reading for the higher-attaining pupils was above that nationally, you had identified that a significant number of pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils, had not made the expected progress or reached expected standards in mathematics and reading at the end of key stage 2.
- You have since provided good-quality training for teachers. The local authority and the expertise within your partnership schools have been effective in supporting you to meet the school's priorities. You have invested in staff development, which is evident in the secure subject knowledge seen at subject-leader and class-teacher level.
- Leaders have thoroughly reviewed the school's monitoring, tracking and assessment systems. This has ensured a consistent approach in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Leaders and teachers make accurate assessments of where pupils are in their learning. Teachers then plan activities accordingly and provide pupils with immediate feedback so that learning is moved on quickly. As a result, pupils are now making good progress from their individual starting points.
- Following my key line of enquiry about reading, we discussed your analysis of last year's reading outcomes. You and your leader of English had identified that pupils' inference and comprehension skills were not being sustained from the end of key stage 1 through to the end of key stage 2. Additionally, pupils did not demonstrate the resilience or have the necessary skills required to complete more complex questions.
- You have addressed this by developing staff knowledge and skills. In lessons visited, teachers used good subject knowledge by using precise vocabulary and skilful questioning. Your rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching of reading is ensuring that there is consistency in the teaching of reading across the school. Pupils in key stage 2 had a clear understanding of inference. Their comprehension skills were being well developed through a range of carefully planned reading and retrieval activities.
- You and your leader of English have successfully raised the profile of reading. Pupils I spoke with were enthusiastic about reading, understood the importance

and could talk about their favourite authors and books. One pupil was particularly concerned that the school library would run out of a series of books he was enjoying so much, while another said that he gets so engrossed in his book that his parents have to remind him to go to bed. Pupils appreciate the regular access they have to the extremely well-resourced school library. They are motivated by the school's reading challenges, such as 'go to a holiday shop and pick up a travel brochure'. The '100 books to read before you leave primary school' initiative has motivated more pupils to read at home.

- The school's accurate pupil progress information shows that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are now making good and better progress in reading. Currently the number of pupils on track to meet the expected and higher standards at the end of key stage 2 is above national averages. However, you agree that there is further work to do to develop pupils' vocabulary across all year groups, so that more pupils make good and better progress and reach the expected and higher standards of attainment.
- While continuing my key line of enquiry about improving outcomes in mathematics, I discussed with you and your mathematics leader the specific actions the school had taken to address the weaknesses at the end of key stage 2. Your analysis of pupils' mathematical understanding identified that pupils were not having enough opportunities to use resources to help them with their mathematical understanding. You have acted to put this right. In all classes I visited, pupils worked well in practical ways to investigate challenging problems set by the teacher.
- Pupils' work shows that their mathematics fluency is now secure across all year groups. Pupils confidently use pictorial representations to understand difficult mathematical concepts. Inspection evidence shows that pupils are making good progress in mathematics and are likely to exceed national averages at the end of the academic year. However, we discussed the need to provide pupils with more opportunities to practise their skills regularly to solve mathematical problems with a larger degree of independence.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to practise and develop their mathematical problem-solving skills.
- pupils are provided with more opportunities to read and listen to high-quality texts to help them build on and extend their vocabulary.

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

Cindy Impey

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, areas for further improvement and information about current pupils' attainment and progress. I visited all year groups and held meetings with you, senior leaders, governors and a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils informally and I also spoke with a number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I examined policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and read the minutes of governor meetings. I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and assessment. This included joint meetings with you and subject leaders of English and mathematics. I looked at a range of pupils' work from across all year groups, subjects and a wide range of abilities. The views of 147 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View were taken into account, as well as 75 responses parents made using the free-text service.