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Mrs Linda Reid
Headteacher
Elsenham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Reid

Short inspection of Elsenham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 September 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 July 2014.

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 specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Your sharply focused and inspirational leadership sets high expectations for all staff and pupils. Over time you have developed insightful systems so that you have a keen idea of how well pupils are progressing. Your focus for the past year has been upon ensuring the well-being of your staff. Your philosophy is that a happy teacher makes a happy child and this is evident throughout the school. Pupils are effusive about school and the staff who responded to the Ofsted staff survey were most complimentary about your, and the senior team's, approach. This was also echoed by parents who I spoke to at the gate and who completed the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. One parent typified the views of many, saying, 'I love this school and its ethos, staff are very approachable and always have the children's best interests at heart.' Another said, 'Elsenham instils wonderful values, good manners and a love of learning.'

Pupils make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2017, Year 6 pupils' progress in reading and mathematics was in the top 3% of schools

nationally; their writing progress was in the top 20% of schools. This was a substantial improvement upon the previous two years' results, and the high-quality work from the last academic year has been sustained in the current pupils' work. Pupils are highly motivated to do well and show rapid progress from their various starting points across the curriculum. Your unvalidated data confirms that these high progress figures have been sustained in 2018. Every class appoints pupils as 'leaders of learning' who plan lessons with their teachers. As a result, pupils are able to speak articulately about why they are learning and they clearly understand how to achieve their learning goals. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a significant strength of the school.

In early years, children also do well. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development is well above the national average. This is continued through key stage 1, where most pupils' attainment is above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check is also well above the national average. An increased proportion of pupils are attaining greater depth in key stage 1 in reading and mathematics. However, a continued focus for senior leaders is to improve the numbers of pupils gaining the higher standard in writing.

The governing body knows the school extremely well. Governors are dedicated, regularly involved in school life and are ambitious for its future. They are passionate about serving the needs of the local community. Currently, governors are steering the school through an extensive building programme which will cater for the expansion of the village. Governors provide effective challenge for school leaders, but also support them with their sharp focus on standards. For example, you are appreciative of their funding decisions, such as expenditure on educational psychology services for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a strong Christian ethos. From when they begin at school, pupils are encouraged to be kind to each other. Pupils told me that this is the most important quality for having good relationships with one another. Their view is that there is little bullying and when it does happen they trust teachers to deal with it quickly. I was told that when pupils fall out they quickly resolve the issue and become friends again, with the help of their teachers. The school's records also show that there are few incidents of bullying. Pupils are well versed about how to keep safe, especially when online. Pupils know how to stay safe when gaming and what to do regarding 'stranger danger'. Pupils also spoke at some length as to how to move safely around the site during the building works.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. For example, senior leaders have regular discussions with various contractors to ensure thorough management of risk during the construction of the new building. Leaders regularly review the quality of safeguarding arrangements, involving the safeguarding governor as appropriate. Reports and actions are

monitored by the full governing body. Staff training is up to date and members of staff fully understand their responsibilities for ensuring that pupils remain safe.

Inspection findings

- Following a recommendation at the last inspection, the school prioritised improving pupils' outcomes in writing. Leaders introduced a more structured approach to the teaching of writing. Writing at length is now timetabled so that all pupils have regular opportunities to draft, edit and refine their work. Teachers are clear about the standards expected in each year group, due to effective staff training.
- Your well-planned actions to improve writing help pupils to make substantial progress in this area. The proportion of pupils that reach the expected standard in the key stage 2 national tests has been above average for the last three years. A scrutiny of current work shows that children in Reception write at length independently, on the line and in cursive script. Strengths were seen in a range of subjects throughout the school, particularly with imaginative writing. For example, in Year 5 pupils demonstrated good control of language when creating horror imagery. One pupil wrote: '... branches grabbing at us, hungry for our flesh', demonstrating the required style well.
- The school has a small proportion of disadvantaged pupils. During the inspection, I wanted to check that disadvantaged pupils are progressing well. Most current disadvantaged pupils are making very good progress from their individual starting points, particularly so in reading and mathematics. This is because staff know exactly how well they are performing and provide excellent guidance and support to help them progress in their learning.
- I also looked at how well pupils achieve in key stage 1. I particularly wanted to know how the school is catering for the most able pupils so that they achieve greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics. Last year, staff explored various ways of teaching the skills needed to secure the higher standards. In particular, teachers made sure their expectations were higher. In 2018, more pupils gained greater depth in reading and mathematics. Pupils were less successful at attaining the higher standard in writing as, on occasion, pupils made errors with their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Current Year 1 pupils talk about their ideas before they write and this has given the pupils the confidence to write more. The most able pupils were able to write well at the end of Reception, writing clearly in cursive script and using accurate punctuation such as speech marks. This is being continued in current pupils' work.
- Finally, I wanted to check on the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. In 2016, reading progress for this group of pupils was a cause for concern. This is no longer the case. In 2018, all pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities made strong progress in reading. Staff are supported well by the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). She is rigorous in her monitoring and makes sure staff are provided with guidance for a range of complex needs.
- Teaching assistants receive regular training and benefit from 'keeping in touch' meetings with the SENCo. As a result, intervention sessions are well planned and

delivered effectively. The impact of this is seen in several individual cases. Pupils' progress is strong, so they now achieve as well as their peers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able key stage 1 pupils are consistently accurate in their spelling, punctuation and grammar
- the quality of education is sustained as the school expands in size.

I am copying this letter to the chairs 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

Liz Smith
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher and the SENCo. I also met with the chairs of the governing body. I spoke to parents and the school's improvement partner. I held discussions with a group of pupils in key stage 2. I listened to nine pupils read from a range of year groups. I visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the effect of your work to improve the quality of teaching. I was accompanied by the deputy headteacher for several of the observations. I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I took account of the 54 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 26 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, its policies and other information available on the school's website.