

13 November 2018

Mrs Julie Ashwell
Headteacher
Raynsford Church of England Academy
Park Lane
Henlow
Bedfordshire
SG16 6AT

Dear Mrs Ashwell

Short inspection of Raynsford Church of England Academy

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have created a strong team that you lead with passion and purpose. Your leaders are committed to providing the best opportunities to support all pupils' educational achievement. Together you seek to make use of local knowledge as well as the best practice from other schools. You conduct in-depth research and discuss new ideas with staff so that there is a shared understanding about the actions you take. Well-planned professional development has contributed to stronger teaching. There is a supportive staff culture of working in partnership with one another. As one staff member commented, 'Everyone supports one another and encourages one another.' Consequently, staff morale is high.

Your leaders have a clear and accurate view about the progress that pupils make. They regularly check the quality of teaching and learning to identify strengths and weaknesses. You use your tracking systems well so that teachers are knowledgeable about the pupils that need additional support to help them catch up.

You have embraced the opportunity to understand how you can meet the complex needs of some of your pupils. Your leaders have made effective links with external agencies and the local authority to improve their skills. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make strong progress from their starting points because their needs are met well.

Your leaders ensure that the school provides a nurturing environment. This helps pupils to thrive, especially in their personal development. Pupils speak warmly about the opportunities to participate in a range of activities to develop their fitness, health and well-being. They told me that they make friends easily and behaviour is good around the school. They are clear about the school's values and understand how they are reflected through their relationships with one another. All pupils are polite and eager to discuss their learning. Pupils enjoy positive relationships with their teachers, stating that, 'Teachers are really good and keep you going when you are stuck.'

Parents agree that their children are happy at school and make good progress. Parents are positive about the way the school provides information about their child's learning that helps them to give support at home. You have ensured that staff are approachable and listen to parental concerns. One parent's comment on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, reflected the sentiment of many others: 'All teaching staff I have encountered are helpful and caring and are genuinely interested in the children.'

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to refine the school's improvement planning. You have provided greater opportunity for subject leaders to develop their own plans. Leaders carry out a thorough review of each curriculum area to identify the next steps required to improve the school. Plans show clearly what actions they will take and subject leaders check the impact of these. You continue to support leaders, especially those who are new to the role, to ensure that their plans are sharply focused. This means that staff are aware of what is expected of them and governors use the information effectively to hold school leaders to account. You were also asked to improve the progress pupils made in mathematics. We agreed that this would form part of the inspection when checking the progress that current pupils are making.

Your leaders have established an effective pre-school provision. Leaders identify the children's development needs early to support their progress. Your leaders have made effective use of speech and language programmes to improve children's communication skills. This means that children are better prepared for their transition into the Reception Year. Pupils are making good progress with learning sounds and letters. Outcomes in the phonics screening check at Year 1 have continued to improve and all pupils achieved the required score in 2018. Pupils use their phonic knowledge well to tackle unfamiliar words in their reading. A range of reading books support pupils' reading skills. The school's own assessments show that, in 2018, the proportions of pupils working at the expected standard and at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 had risen from the previous year. However, inspection evidence showed that spelling is still inconsistent. We agreed that there is still more work to do to improve spelling across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. This has been achieved through regular staff training that has

also been provided for all governors. Members of staff I spoke with were clear about their roles in keeping children safe. They were able to talk about recent updates and how they report concerns. You work well with external agencies and pursue actions to ensure that vulnerable children receive the support they are entitled to.

You make careful checks on the suitability of adults who work at the school, including volunteers. Governors also check records and make recommendations so that documents are well maintained and up to date.

Pupils have a good understanding about how to keep themselves safe. They are taught how to be safe when using computers and know how to recognise signs of cyber bullying when they are online. Pupils understand what constitutes bullying and told me that it is rare in their school. They were clear that if they are worried they would discuss their concerns with adults.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on several lines of enquiry. The first of these concerned pupils' current progress, especially in key stage 2. This is because there is no published information for how pupils progress in Years 3 and 4. The school's own information shows that in 2018 pupils made strong gains in reading. Following the previous inspection, you commissioned an audit of reading and acted promptly on its recommendations. You have ensured a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics and set ambitious expectations for all pupils to be fluent readers by the time they start key stage 2. Regular reading is part of the school day and this has supported pupils' progress in reading fluency and stamina.
- Leaders have successfully implemented new approaches to develop mastery in mathematics. Your school's chosen approach ensures that pupils have a secure understanding of different mathematical concepts. The work in pupils' books shows how pupils demonstrate their knowledge using a range of strategies. There is a clearly planned sequence of learning that develops pupils' mathematical skills. For example, pupils' knowledge of negative numbers was developed successfully by applying their skills to reading the difference in temperatures shown on thermometers. Teachers skilfully check pupils' understanding by asking a range of questions such as 'Prove it', 'Why is this correct?' and 'Explain your answer.' Consequently, pupils are making good progress in mathematics.
- As I visited classes I looked at pupils' writing both in their literacy books and across different subjects. Pupils are making better use of language in their compositions, especially when writing for a purpose. For example, a pupil's letter painted a clear picture of being an evacuee when writing, 'Worried sick, Tom and I anxiously lined up and waited.' However, teachers' expectations for the quality of pupils' handwriting, spelling and punctuation are not high enough. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write at greater length. Therefore, pupils are not developing their writing stamina and resilience. Teachers do not readily check misconceptions, so pupils make repeated errors in their writing. Opportunities to use their written skills in other subjects are limited. You have rightly identified

that more work is required to ensure that pupils' progress in writing is as good as in reading and mathematics.

- Attainment at the end of key stage 1 between 2016 and 2017 has been consistently above national averages at expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, attainment for the most able pupils has been variable across different subjects. I wanted to check whether the teaching challenged the most-able pupils.
- Leaders provide a sharp focus for ensuring that work is challenging to meet the needs of the most able pupils. From the start, leaders challenge children with 'rainbow challenges' in the early years provision. Teachers use children's interests to provide purposeful activities to promote their development. Teachers across the school use questioning effectively to support pupils' thinking more deeply about the things they study. They provide pupils with opportunities to 'dive for treasure' to help raise the expectations of what they may achieve during the lesson. Your school assessment information for 2018 shows that there was an increase in the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this is not consistent across different subjects. Pupils' work in books shows that they complete similar activities that do not sufficiently challenge the most able pupils.
- You have a clear vision for the curriculum provided at Raynsford. It is well rooted in developing pupils' understanding of their local community and becoming responsible and active citizens. Teachers plan tasks that build on pupils' interests to motivate their learning. For example, a science 'tinker table' was helping to promote pupils' questioning and curiosity about Albert Einstein. Pupils make good use of media to record their activities and share the outcomes with parents. This helps to develop effective links between home and school. Your leaders provide opportunities for pupils to develop their talents through different activities such as music and sport. Consequently, the rich curriculum is developing pupils' artistic, scientific and technological skills well.
- Finally, I wanted to focus on how governors challenge and support school leaders. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They make effective use of this knowledge to question leaders about their actions and outcomes for the school. Governors pursue leaders' responses when they are not satisfied and agree next step actions with leaders. These are checked to ensure that leaders have acted upon them and made the required improvements. Governors use their range of skills to check all aspects of the school's work. They ensure that additional funding is used well to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that teachers:

- have high expectations of pupils' handwriting, spelling and punctuation skills in every lesson
- plan opportunities for pupils to write at length across the curriculum to develop

their writing stamina and resilience

- make use of assessment information to challenge pupils to achieve higher standards in a range of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you about the progress since the previous inspection and agreed the key lines of enquiry. I considered leaders' evaluation of the quality of education, plans for improvement and school information about current pupils' achievement.

I met with other leaders including the strategic leaders for teaching and learning and inclusion, the mathematics subject leader and other subject leaders. I had a meeting with six governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke with the virtual headteacher from the local authority.

I visited all classes. I observed teaching and learning in lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke informally with pupils. I also met with a group of key stage 2 pupils more formally to talk about their school experience.

I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including subject leaders' improvement plans and minutes of the governing body's meetings. I also reviewed the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children. I held a discussion with you as one of the school's designated safeguarding leads.

Additionally, I took into account the 89 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 62 free-text responses from parents. I also analysed the 40 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and the 26 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.