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Miss Julie Harper  
Headteacher  
St Peter's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Sible Hedingham  
School Road  
Sible Hedingham  
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Essex  
CO9 3NR

Dear Miss Harper

### **Short inspection of St Peter's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Sible Hedingham**

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You have taken effective steps to improve some, but not all, aspects of school provision. Some key areas are not good enough. For example, the previous inspection identified a need for leaders to identify areas for improvement more precisely. Your evaluation of the work of the school does not allow you to do this. It does not accurately reflect the performance of the school. It does not focus sufficiently on the progress that pupils make from their starting points or give a true reflection of where pupils have not achieved well enough over time.

In addition, those aspects which your evaluation indicates need to be better are not consistently taken through into your improvement plans. Your objectives for the use of pupil premium funding are inconsistent across different plans and they do not reflect your published review of 2017 pupil premium spending. You and other leaders do not have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and your plans are not closely aligned to what needs to be improved.

Governors I spoke with during the inspection demonstrated a similar lack of strategic awareness. They are over reliant on the information that you provide and do not challenge you and other leaders sufficiently. For example, attendance has

been below the national average for some time. Governors told me that there was no more that leaders could do to improve it. However, attendance remains stubbornly low and does need to be better.

Some aspects of provision work well. You and other leaders have adopted an effective new approach to teaching mathematics. This is having a positive impact and is already supporting pupils to make good progress in mathematics. Pupils I spoke with were enthusiastic about the curriculum. They told me how much they enjoyed the interesting range of topic work they complete.

You have successfully built on some recommendations from the previous inspection of the school. Teaching now typically ensures that pupils are eager to learn. Pupils are attentive, interested and work well. Pupils also now speak confidently and communicate well with others.

Pupils I spoke with during their free time told me that they enjoy school and that it is a welcoming place where being different is fine. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, are also positive about the school. Almost all of them would recommend it to others and they, too, said their children are happy there.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have a clear record of recruitment and pre-employment checks on adults who work in the school. You ensure staff have up-to-date safeguarding training. Your safeguarding records are well maintained and demonstrate how you follow up concerns appropriately, including with external agencies. Your systems enable staff to pass on any worries they have. The processes and procedures you have in place are effective in keeping children safe.

Pupils I spoke with told me that there is an adult in school they would talk to if something was worrying them. They told me that bullying is rare but that, if it did happen, they are confident that adults would deal with it well. All the pupils I asked told me that they feel safe in school.

### **Inspection findings**

- To determine whether the school remained good, I wanted to establish whether you had improved the teaching of writing. In each of 2015, 2016 and 2017, pupils' progress at key stage 2 in writing was in the bottom 40% of schools in the country.
- Provisional outcomes for 2018 indicate that pupils' progress has worsened. Work I looked at in pupils' books during the inspection showed that basic misconceptions in spelling, punctuation and grammar often persist. Pupils' technical accuracy in writing is not as good as it should be and this is often not being addressed by teachers. You have not secured sufficiently high standards in the quality of writing.

- I also wanted to check whether pupils are now making good progress in reading and mathematics at key stage 2. Pupils' progress in reading and mathematics increased steadily from 2015 to 2017. Provisional key stage 2 information indicates that outcomes in both of these subjects declined in 2018, though not as much as in writing.
- You are in the process of reviewing the way in which reading is taught. However, your new strategies have yet to take hold. It is too early to see the impact of this work on the progress pupils make.
- Your improvements to mathematics teaching have been more successful and have had a positive impact. Pupils now explore mathematical techniques in a range of ways. They use mathematics fluently and can adopt different approaches to solving mathematical problems. Pupils' books now typically show clear reasoning and strong development of mathematical skills and concepts over time.
- My final line of enquiry related to how well you understand and meet the needs of all groups of pupils. This is because the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), has not been consistently strong over time and between subjects.
- Your approach to both of these groups is to identify the needs of individual pupils and to endeavour to meet them. In some cases, pupils' individual needs are understood and catered for well. However, the support that pupils get does not consistently help them to make the progress they should. This is because it is sometimes not closely matched to the things which are preventing them from learning. The impact of the help that these pupils get is not consistently reviewed in a timely fashion, or changes communicated to teachers quickly enough.
- You and other leaders have identified where some of these pupils have underachieved in the past, but you are not able to account for why they have made more progress in some subjects than others. Because the understanding of the impact of your work for these pupils is not precise, their needs are not as well met as they should be.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they evaluate the impact of their work in a precise and timely fashion to:
  - facilitate more effective action planning which focuses well on key areas for school improvement
  - make sure that the strategies they use to support the identified needs of groups of pupils are effective and help those pupils to make good progress
- governors develop effective systems for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the school and for holding leaders to account
- the progress that pupils make from their starting points increases, particularly in writing, so that pupils achieve in line with their abilities
- they improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average.

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

Andrew Hemmings  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I spoke with you, other leaders and six governors. I visited all classes, sometimes accompanied by you, and reviewed pupils' work in their books. I looked at information about pupils' progress and reviewed a range of documentation relating to the school's self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding arrangements. I reviewed minutes of governing body meetings.

I considered the 34 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 25 responses from parents to the free-text option. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. I spoke with 12 pupils during their lunch break to hear their views.