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Mrs Jo Woolley  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England VA Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Woolley

### **Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England VA Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 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 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. There have been recent significant changes in the senior and middle leadership team. You and new leaders have quickly formed a skilled and effective team with a shared determination to continue to raise standards and improve pupils' progress.

You evaluate the work of the school clearly and accurately. Consequently, your school development plan is addressing the right priorities to help you continue to improve teaching and learning. You ensure that teachers have high-quality professional development so that they are well placed to bring about the planned improvements. For example, you have used expert advice on developing pupils' abstract thinking in mathematics and these new ways of teaching are being used effectively across the school. Skilled and experienced governors have oversight of the school's work and share your determination that all pupils achieve well. You have made good use of the school's additional funding, for example, to support the inclusion and well-being of disadvantaged pupils. Governors regularly keep this under review to ensure that pupils' achievement indicates that the spending has been effective.

At the time of the previous inspection you were asked to ensure that lower-ability pupils were well supported in mathematics. You have developed a wide range of additional support in English and mathematics. Teachers assess pupils' needs accurately and pupils of all abilities are included well in lessons. You were also asked to give pupils wider opportunities to apply their skills of English and

mathematics across the curriculum. Pupils regularly write in history and their science books show that they have opportunities to apply their mathematical skills through recording findings in graphs and charts. Your current plans identify the need to develop further the teaching of both English and mathematics to strengthen progress for all pupils.

Pupils behave well in school and are positive about the opportunities that help them to develop as good people as well as good learners. They strive to be 'caring, courageous and curious' in line with school values. Parents spoken to say they valued the family feeling of the school and the way that new pupils are welcomed and quickly helped to fit in.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

A strong culture of safeguarding pupils' welfare is shared by leaders, staff and governors. You ensure that all training is kept up to date and is relevant to the work of the school. You have recently introduced a comprehensive system for recording concerns staff may have that a pupil is at risk. Staff are using this well and you make timely referrals to external agencies to seek support for families who need it.

You make comprehensive checks to ensure that staff and volunteers are safe to work with pupils and records of these checks are kept in good order. Governors monitor the school's safeguarding procedures effectively. They are vigilant in matters of health and safety and ensure that the school is a secure and attractive place for pupils to learn.

Pupils say that they are taught about 'stranger danger' and about using the internet safely. They feel safe in school and can talk about the school's participation in the current anti-bullying week. They say that a few pupils act thoughtlessly at times calling others silly names in the playground, but these are isolated incidences of this form of bullying. Almost all parents feel their children are safe in school. However, a small number of parents feel that allegations of bullying are not always dealt with effectively. Your records show that you address parents' concerns and use pastoral support to ensure that pupils feel well supported. You are currently reviewing the school's anti-bullying approach and are planning to undertake consultation with parents in this regard. This inspection found no evidence that allegations of bullying are not dealt with seriously or effectively. The school's record of fixed-term exclusion in the past has been higher than the average, but this is reducing. The very small number of pupils with challenging behaviour is supported through the school's extensive programme of pastoral care.

### **Inspection findings**

- Over the course of the inspection I reviewed the progress that pupils are making in mathematics and writing. I also reviewed the progress children in the early years are making towards reaching or exceeding the standards expected for their age.
- You have responded to the fact that the progress that pupils make in

mathematics has not been as strong in recent years as progress made in other subjects, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Your actions have strengthened the teaching of basic skills of number facts and multiplication tables and established a consistent approach to teaching mathematical calculation. Pupils' work now shows their improved confidence, accuracy and fluency with arithmetic. You have introduced effective programmes, which are helping disadvantaged pupils at risk of falling behind in these skills to catch up quickly.

- You have recently put in place a consistent approach to developing pupils' ability to solve problems and deepen their understanding of mathematics. Currently, some pupils do not fully express their answers to problems using the correct mathematical language. Pupils have also not fully acquired the skills of tackling reasoning challenges systematically. While they were seen to work enthusiastically and cooperatively on sorting number cards into 'empty boxes' to prove a calculation, at times they lacked a clear strategy to tackle this and were not successful with the challenge. Pupils' workbooks show that while they are regularly given challenges in mathematics, there is further work to be done to strengthen this aspect of their learning.
- You and leaders have worked effectively to strengthen the teaching of writing. The effectiveness of this work can be seen particularly in key stage 1. You responded last year to guidance that pupils should have more opportunities to write in order particularly for the most able to deepen their writing. Pupils' workbooks now show that they write frequently and are building stamina and confidence towards being effective writers. Recent improvements have been made to the standards that pupils reach in their phonic skills. This is having a positive effect on pupils' spelling in key stage 1 which shows increasing accuracy.
- In key stage 2 older pupils are bringing depth to their writing and creating interest by using effective vocabulary. Pupils' writing on Beowulf showed their good skills in adapting the tone of their writing to the style of the story. Further scrutiny of pupils' work in other year groups shows that there is more work to be done to ensure that all pupils in key stage 2 have the same range of opportunities to develop and improve their writing.
- Over recent years the proportion of children in the early years reaching a good level of development has been a little below the national average. In 2018 it was lower. This was because a smaller proportion of children reached the expected standard in writing. Teachers make accurate assessments of children's skills and knowledge on entry to the school. They maintain well-kept records of assessments and samples of children's work which show that children are making reasonable progress.
- Children in early years are now learning in classes with Year 1 pupils. They work harmoniously together. Children regularly learn and practise writing phonic sounds to support their early reading and writing. In class children were seen mark making with pens and sorting out magnetic letters to make words. Currently, not all children are forming their letters accurately and independently enough to begin writing the words they can sound out. Teachers have recognised the need to develop children's skills in writing and recent professional development is supporting them in planning further to address this priority.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers develop the deeper mathematical thinking and reasoning skills of all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged
- teaching across key stage 2 more consistently develops pupils' writing skills and strengthens their progress
- children in early years have wider opportunities to develop and apply their writing skills so that more reach or exceed the standard expected for their age.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Marriott  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you and your team of subject leaders. Together, we visited lessons in all classes and I spoke to pupils about their learning. I reviewed a sample of pupils' work in English and mathematics. I met with a group of governors and spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I met with a group of pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 and spoke to other pupils in the playground at lunchtime. I reviewed the school's self-evaluation and the school development plan. I also considered a range of documentation in relation to the school's approach to safeguarding. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and considered the 80 responses and 14 comments from parents on Parent View. I also took account of a letter from a parent. The views of staff were taken account of through the 30 responses to the staff survey.