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7 December 2018

Mr Andrew Frolish
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Frolish

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Hadleigh

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2015.

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.**

Leaders have established a nurturing and supportive environment where pupils and families are welcomed into the 'St Mary's family'. Many pupils join the school at different times of the school year from the military services. Leaders ensure that these pupils settle quickly and that their social and emotional needs are met well.

There have been significant recent changes in school leaders and their responsibilities. In September 2018, a senior teacher was permanently appointed as deputy headteacher. You successfully recruited a new member of staff to lead the key stage 1 phase. This has resulted in stronger capacity of leadership. Despite the changes, you have sustained a strong team ethic. Staff enjoy working at the school and value the support of their colleagues. One staff member commented that 'We are a strong team and support each other in all we do'.

Leaders' analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate. Leaders identified quickly that pupils were not reading confidently. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was below the national average in 2017. The teaching of phonics is now closely matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Leaders use assessment effectively to provide additional support to help pupils catch up. In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was above the

national average. This reflects the improvement in the teaching of phonics. Leaders introduced new reading books. Pupils are encouraged to read widely and regularly. Frequent checks are made on pupils' progress in reading. Consequently, pupils' reading stamina and fluency are improving. The published information for 2018 shows that progress between key stage 1 and key stage 2 was above the national average.

Leaders are proud of the curriculum provided at St Mary's. Displays and pupils' work are a testament to their art and design skills and knowledge of different subjects. Pupils' creative and technical skills are developed well.

Leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, the actions they have introduced have not been effective in raising standards where planned, especially in mathematics. The strategies that teachers are using to raise pupils' achievement are not having the intended impact.

Governors share leaders' commitment to provide a welcoming and safe environment for pupils. They use smaller working groups to provide a sharper challenge to school leaders. Governors have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use their skills well to check that the actions identified within the school development plan are carried out. However, governors' challenge is not as swift as it could be where school plans do not provide timely measures of success.

The vast majority of parents and carers are positive about the school and the caring ethos your team creates. All parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, recommend the school. A typical view was 'lovely atmosphere, great little school'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school places a high priority upon the pupils' well-being and safety. Regular checks ensure that the staff understand their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe. Staff are well trained and receive regular briefings to keep their knowledge up to date. Leaders 'go the extra mile' to check on the well-being of vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders provide valuable support by monitoring and checking on the welfare of pupils.

Safeguarding records are well maintained. They are reviewed regularly so that the agreed actions are taken to safeguard pupils. Leaders carry out the necessary checks to ensure that all adults employed at the school are safe to work with children.

Pupils feel safe at school. Pupils who join the school at different times say that they are happy and make friends quickly. Pupils are proud of their responsibilities that help to keep other pupils safe, for example acting as play leaders or junior road safety officers. Pupils understand how to use the internet safely. They are confident that, if they have any concerns, adults will listen to them and support them.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to find out whether leaders' actions have improved rates of attendance. In 2017, the attendance rate was below the national average and regular non-attendance was above average. You have introduced incentives to encourage pupils to attend more frequently. Letters are written to parents to remind them about the importance of attendance. Governors are now using the services of an education welfare officer to help to provide a regular focus on tracking attendance. However, the actions are not systematic and lack a consistent approach. The rates of attendance did not improve in 2018 and regular non-attendance remains high. Current rates of attendance for this school year are now starting to show an improvement.
- Second, I focused on how well school leaders have responded to the 2018 national tests in mathematics. This was because pupils' progress in mathematics between key stage 1 and key stage 2 was below the national average. Pupils' attainment at both key stage 1 and key stage 2 was below average at expected standards.
- We observed mathematics lessons, talked to pupils and examined pupils' work in books. Where teaching is stronger, there is good questioning that checks pupils' understanding. By using sentence stems such as 'the strategy I used' and 'I check my answer by' to prompt pupils' thinking, they are able to demonstrate their secure understanding of mathematical concepts. This is not evident in all the teaching seen. Work in the books is inconsistent. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their reasoning or apply their skills to solving mathematical problems. You explained that new approaches have only recently been introduced. Not all teachers have a good understanding of how to use these strategies to support the improvement required in mathematics. Consequently, pupils' progress is not consistent across all year groups.
- For my third line of enquiry, I checked how well pupils are challenged in their learning to achieve the higher standards. In 2018, attainment was below national averages in key stage 2 at high standards in reading and mathematics and at greater depth in writing. Leaders' actions to improve reading are having a positive impact for the most able pupils. A greater choice of high-quality fiction and a stronger focus in teaching are improving their reading skills. The school's assessments show that more pupils are reading at higher standards across key stage 2.
- Where teachers' expectations are high, the most able pupils are provided with work that challenges their thinking. For example, in mathematics, 'chilli challenges' encourage pupils to apply their skills to more complex problems. However, some teachers do not share the same high expectations. The work in their books shows that the most able pupils do not make consistently good progress.
- Fourth, I wanted to investigate how well pupils apply their skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling in all their writing. This is because the standard pupils attained in 2018 in English grammar, punctuation and spelling was below the national average at expected and the high standard at key stage 2.
- We scrutinised workbooks from across the curriculum. Work in upper key stage 2 pupils' books is neatly presented. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to write at length in different subjects. For example, pupils wrote clear explanations for their experiments in science. In these books, teachers set clear expectations for how

pupils record their work and make good use of their writing skills. However, we found that, where work is recorded in books other than English, there is a greater inconsistency regarding the quality of pupils' writing. Teachers do not consistently address pupils' errors. The quality of their spelling and punctuation is variable and pupils do not apply their skills well.

- Finally, I wanted to look at how leaders ensure that children in the early years make a good start to their education. The proportion of children achieving the good level of development at the end of Reception dipped in 2017 and was below the national average.
- Leaders have acted swiftly. Information is used well to identify the areas of children's development that require improvement. There is a sharp focus on children's writing. Children are encouraged to write during their play and in adult-led activities. For example, during snack time, one child had responsibility for recording the preferences of each child's snack. Adults challenge the children with their questions, especially in mathematics. For example, a child was asked to work out the amount two items would cost, as well as the change he would receive. Children are making good progress from their starting points. In 2018, the proportion of children reaching the good level of development improved and was above the national average. More children also exceeded the early learning goal in number.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance improves so that it is at least in line with the national average
- teachers understand how to use the mathematical strategies to develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills
- teachers plan work that challenges the most able pupils
- pupils apply their skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling in all of their writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and the leader of the early years. I met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the multi-academy trust. I visited classes across the school with you and looked at samples of pupils' work, observed the teaching of mathematics and spoke to pupils. I met with a group of eight pupils from key stage 2 and talked about their learning.

I took account of 33 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including four free-text responses. I considered 15 staff questionnaires. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and the pupil premium strategy. I viewed information about pupils' attainment and progress. I scrutinised the safeguarding documents and I undertook a review of the school's website.