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Michelle Holford
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Dear Mrs Holford

Short inspection of Millfields Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 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 March 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.**

Millfields is a school where senior leaders form a cohesive team, staff morale is high and pupils are happy, safe and engaged in learning. All staff who completed the inspection survey said that they are proud to work at the school. They are appreciative of the professional development and training available and say that pupils' behaviour is good and always well managed. Pupils enjoy the school's extensive grounds and playing areas. They move around the school safely, and with due consideration for others, and enjoy attending the breakfast club. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour in classes was consistently good.

The school takes a systematic approach to teaching phonics. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are secure in their phonics skills and knowledge in the national check in 2018 was greater than in previous years. Pupils who read to me did so confidently and with good intonation. The less-able readers are appropriately challenged. They use their phonics skills well to sound out and read unfamiliar words. Older pupils spoke confidently to me about characters in the book they are currently reading in Year 6, Michael Morpurgo's 'War Horse'. They also confidently discussed the themes and imagery in John McCrae's poem, 'In Flanders Fields'. Younger pupils were eager to tell me about their reading, linked to the Great Fire of London, about which they are very knowledgeable.

Together with the early years leader, you have improved all aspects of the early years provision, which has recently been extended to meet the requirements of two-year-old children. Children are cooperative, well-behaved and safe. During the inspection, they were eager to show me their writing, mathematics and creative work. They were especially keen for me to see their 'alien invitations' to the forthcoming party they had planned. Staff have good relationships with parents and carers and regularly share information on children's progress. In 2018, three-quarters of children, including those eligible for pupil premium funding, attained a good level of development. These children, now in Year 1, are well equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful learners in key stage 1 and beyond.

Parents are of the view that their children are safe and looked after well. This was evident from the text messages I read during the inspection and apparent when I met with parents. Parents say that communication with the school and children's behaviour are good. They are especially complimentary about the school's work to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Typically, parents commented, 'I feel happy about the school and wouldn't hesitate to recommend it,' and, 'The school is willing to "go the extra mile" to support children with special needs.'

You have been successful in encouraging pupils to take pride in their work. As a result, the quality of pupils' work in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics, has improved. However, there are still areas for improvement, identified at the previous inspection, that have not been resolved. Specifically, there is more to do to ensure that the most able pupils are consistently challenged. In addition, pupils' writing skills are not developing quickly enough. This led to their below-average attainment at the end of both key stages 1 and 2 in 2018.

The other areas we discussed, which require attention, relate to the quality of leadership and management. Governors do not have a good enough understanding of the school's strengths, or what needs to improve. This limits their ability to hold senior leaders and teachers accountable for improving the quality of teaching and pupils' academic performance.

Senior leaders' plans, including those linked to improving standards in key stage 1, and the school's evaluation of its own performance, lack the clarity needed to rapidly move the school forward. Plans focus on the areas in need of further improvement. However, little information is available on how success will be measured and who will be responsible for bringing about change.

Safeguarding is effective.

- All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders make sure that all staff are trained well and that safeguarding records are accurate. All checks are made on staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. Designated safeguarding leaders are

trained to a high standard. All staff know how to spot signs of neglect and/or abuse.

- The safeguarding policy is current and available on the school's website. Staff are familiar with the school's policies and government guidelines, including the latest guidance on keeping children safe in education. All staff have had 'Prevent' duty training, which is in keeping with the government's agenda to counter terrorism and radicalisation.
- Pupils know how to stay safe in school and when online. They are aware of the potential dangers of using electronic means of communication. Those I spoke with were very positive about the school. Pupils are adamant that no bullying takes place and say that any minor 'fall-outs' are usually temporary as pupils always 'make-up'.
- Pupils are aware of different types of discrimination, such as racism, which they say never take place at school. Pupils say that they are confident in speaking to any member of staff if they are concerned about anything. Leaders work effectively with parents and other stakeholders to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry related to pupils' writing. As indicated, this was an area for improvement identified at the school's previous inspection. In 2018, at the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment was low and their progress was weak.
- Teachers are beginning to take a consistent approach to developing pupils' writing skills. This was evident in a Year 6 English class, where the teacher ensured that pupils were well equipped with an 'armoury' of complex words, such as 'apprehensive', 'feeble' and 'underestimated', to enrich their written work. Once equipped, pupils produced interesting pieces of writing about the motivations and feelings of various characters in the novel *War Horse*.
- Too few opportunities are available for pupils to practise and refine their writing skills across the curriculum. The school's own data indicates that in some classes, too few pupils are making the good progress of which they are capable in writing. This shows that there is more to do to improve pupils' writing skills, particularly those of the most able.
- My next line of enquiry focused on challenge. Specifically, I wanted to know what the school was doing to support the most able and increase the proportion attaining at the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- At the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2018, no pupils attained greater depth or the higher standard in mathematics. This represented a considerable dip in performance when compared to pupils' performance in 2017. The school's data shows that a higher proportion of pupils are making good progress this year. However, when I spoke with pupils about their learning, several said that work in mathematics was sometimes too easy. This is evident in pupils' workbooks, where the most able are sometimes given the same calculation and problem-solving tasks as other pupils.

- Staff training and workshops for the most able writers and mathematicians are beginning to raise standards. In addition, daily whole-school mathematics sessions are helping to develop pupils' fluency in the use of basic operations and times-tables. As a result, pupils are attempting more challenging problem-solving activities in class. However, work in this area is recent and still developing.
- For my third line of enquiry, I wanted to assess how effectively senior leaders are using the pupil premium to raise standards for disadvantaged pupils. While there is evidence that differences are diminishing between the performance of this group and others nationally, they are not doing so rapidly enough. The school's own data shows a mixed picture of success. Too few of these pupils are making consistently good progress.
- National data shows that at the end of Year 6 in 2018, disadvantaged pupils' progress in reading and mathematics was at the national average but well below the national average in writing. Attainment was low, few reached the higher standard in reading and writing and none attained greater depth in mathematics.
- The pupil premium funding is not used as effectively as it should be. The school's plans for 2017 and 2018 lack precision and do not indicate clearly enough how funding will raise disadvantaged pupils' achievement. Information on the proposed spending for this academic year is available on the school's website. However, plans do not state clearly enough how senior leaders will measure the impact of their spending. As a result, governors are not able to fully challenge senior leaders on the school's use of this additional funding.
- My final line of enquiry related to pupils' attendance. I wanted to focus on this area because, though improving, pupils' attendance has been below the national average in previous years. In addition, persistent absence has been high for all pupils for the last three years up until 2017. Your approach to improving attendance has been very successful this year. The school's good work with parents and partners, and your celebration of good attendance, has helped to ensure that currently attendance is above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics improves in order to raise outcomes by the end of key stages 1 and 2
- pupils can more readily practise and refine their writing skills across the curriculum
- senior leaders and governors review the impact of the pupil premium funding on raising standards for disadvantaged pupils
- governors have a fuller overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses and more effectively hold senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching and learning
- improvement plans and procedures for monitoring teachers' performance are sharpened, to raise standards and move the school forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Lenford White
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders. I also met with other leaders, including those responsible for mathematics and English. We visited classes across the school. I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority and a discussion with a random sample of pupils. I also listened to pupils read and held a discussion with the chair of the governing body. I examined various documents, including action plans for English and mathematics and for the use of the pupil premium funding, alongside data on pupils' performance. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and looked at policies, including those for behaviour, safeguarding and the curriculum.

I took account of parents' views at the start of the school day. I also considered 10 free-text messages from parents, 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 10 responses to the staff questionnaire.