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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Alison Simpson
Headteacher
Tewin Cowper Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Cannons Meadow
Tewin
Welwyn
Hertfordshire
AL6 0JU

Dear Mrs Simpson

Short inspection of Tewin Cowper Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 January 2019, 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 April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school's motto 'small school, big dreams' is embraced by leaders, staff and governors alike. Leaders and staff know the pupils and families well and have built a strong sense of community. There is a shared commitment to help every pupil achieve as well as they can. Although the school buildings have been extended and the number of pupils increased, it retains the family feel of a smaller school. Tewin Cowper is a calm and purposeful place to learn. This was evident in all classes and around the school, where, despite being the first day of a new term, adults and pupils were settled, focused and happily working together. Pupils told me, 'If you feel sad or lonely there are lots of people to help you.' This reflects pupils' views that they are well known by all adults and they feel well cared for.

Leaders and staff have fostered open and supportive partnerships with parents and carers. Many parents who provided responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View spoke very highly of the 'friendly and approachable' teachers. Parents liken the school to a 'happy family' and are reassured that staff will listen to them should they have any concerns. The overwhelming majority of parents would recommend the school to others. They feel that their children are happy, enjoy school and make good progress.

Pupils are equally positive about their school and they would recommend Tewin Cowper to a friend. They commented proudly, 'We might be small in number, but we have lots of opportunities and we achieve a lot.' Pupils were able to talk confidently about the school's values, such as 'perseverance' and 'trust' and how if they keep the values they will 'be better people who do the right thing'.

Leaders ensure that the many positive experiences pupils have extend beyond the curriculum. For example, pupils relish the leadership opportunities that the school offers. They are keen to take on roles and responsibilities, such as being a member of the school council, a religious education ambassador or a playground leader. They value the contribution they make to the smooth running of the school. Pupils speak passionately about their involvement in the many events that support the local community, such as maypole dancing on the village green, maintaining a nearby allotment and leading regular services at the local church.

Governors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have a range of relevant skills and experience to support the work of the school. Governors are enthusiastic and highly motivated to ensure that the school continues to improve. They make regular visits to check on the school's work towards meeting its improvement priorities. Governors ensure that they are well trained in all aspects of their role, so that they can provide appropriate challenge and support school leaders. For example, recent training from the local authority in understanding the published information on pupils' outcomes has enabled governors to ask the right questions and challenge school leaders about the progress all pupils make.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have addressed the areas identified as needing further improvement. For example, the report recommended that the quality of teaching should improve so that tasks set in lessons are appropriately challenging for pupils, including the most able. Staff have received training, and this has led to higher expectations and more consistent teaching approaches across the school. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils, including the most able, are routinely challenged and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders have an accurate view of the school. They have identified clear priorities to secure further development and are taking the right steps to achieve them through focused improvement plans. For example, leaders have introduced a more rigorous approach to assessing pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders check progress through regular meetings with staff, so that teachers can improve the quality of their teaching. Where pupils need to catch up, additional support is provided swiftly and effectively. The school's chosen system for assessing pupils' progress in other subjects has very recently been introduced, and so leaders and governors do not yet have a clear understanding of pupils' achievement across curriculum subjects aside from English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including members of the governing body, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They understand the risks children may face in the community and across the country. Leaders make sure that staff receive regular and up-to-date training in child protection. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about their responsibilities. They are vigilant and confident to report any concerns they have if they believe pupils could be at risk of harm.

The office team ensures that all the statutory checks on staff, volunteers and visitors are made to support the safety of the school and the pupils. Members of the governing body make regular checks on all safeguarding practices. Leaders work closely with other professionals and services to ensure that children and families receive timely and effective support. Record-keeping is well organised, and records are kept securely.

Parents and staff unanimously share the view that pupils are safe in the school. Pupils told me that incidents of bullying are extremely rare, and they are confident that teachers will deal with any concerns effectively. As a result, pupils report that they feel safe and happy. They explained to me how there is always an adult in the school they can talk to if they have worries or concerns. Pupils also learn about how to keep themselves safe, including how to stay safe online and on the roads.

Inspection findings

- At our initial meeting, we agreed the lines of enquiry to explore so that I could be satisfied that the school remains good. First, I considered how leaders are ensuring that pupils achieve well in writing across the school. Improving the quality of teaching in writing was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. Published assessment information shows that, since the previous inspection, compared to national results, pupils have not achieved as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics.
- Leaders have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in writing. Following training, teachers make sure that pupils have access to high-quality reading books and challenge them to use a range of interesting vocabulary and punctuation to make their written work more interesting and accurate. During the inspection, I saw children in Reception joining in eagerly as the teacher retold the story of 'The Gingerbread Man'. Year 5 pupils were enthusiastically choosing different words to describe 'suspense' and Year 6 pupils were carefully considering adjectives to describe an alien from a different culture. One pupil explained to me that they were using a dictionary to improve their spelling, and another pupil, who was looking in a thesaurus, stated, 'This will help me use better words in my writing, like changing 'funny' to 'hilarious''.
- Teachers use displays of vocabulary, spellings and grammar in all classrooms to remind pupils how to improve their writing. Pupils told me they find these helpful because, 'if you read the information it helps you to get better'. In all year groups, pupils write regularly across different subjects, and older pupils write at

length. Pupils enjoy writing for different purposes. They were keen to show me their topic books, which included a wide range of writing. For example, as part of their history work, Year 2 pupils had written letters to Lord Montecagle, warning him about the Gunpowder Plot, and, while studying ancient Greece, Year 5 pupils had written newspaper reports retelling the story of the Battle of Marathon. Pupils were communicating their ideas effectively, and their spelling, punctuation and grammar were accurate. Most pupils' handwriting is neat and well presented with letters correctly formed. The books of current pupils and the school's own assessments show that pupils across all year groups are making good progress in their writing.

- Another line of enquiry focused on how leaders monitor the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils across all subjects to ensure that pupils achieve well. I wanted to investigate whether the actions of your subject leaders enable pupils to make consistently good progress in a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders and staff ensure that pupils have access to a rich and varied curriculum. Exciting and relevant topics foster a love of learning, as well as encourage pupils to care for others and the world around them. As well as the attention you give to developing an understanding of world faiths, customs and cultures, the school's Christian ethos further enhances pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils told me that they enjoy the many and varied topics and events planned for them.
- Prior to moving to single-age classes in September 2018, leaders reviewed curriculum plans in all year groups and across all subjects. This ensured that there is no repetition in the work given to pupils, and chosen topics cover all aspects of the national curriculum.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics have a thorough understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements in their subjects. A rigorous assessment system monitors pupils' progress and addresses any underachievement. Leaders for subjects other than English and mathematics check the quality of teaching in their subjects through observing lessons, scrutinising teachers' plans, talking to pupils and looking at pupils' work books. Consequently, subject leaders across all subjects can identify where teaching approaches are most effective and where they need to improve. However, these leaders have only recently introduced their chosen system for assessing pupils' progress in subjects such as history, geography and art. The system is not firmly in place, and so staff do not yet fully evaluate the progress pupils make in all subjects to ensure that pupils consistently achieve well across the curriculum.
- Finally, I looked at how well pupils are supported and encouraged to attend school. Since the previous inspection, the attendance of pupils at the school has fluctuated and has not always been as positive as the national average. Additionally, while the vast majority of pupils attend the school regularly, a small number of pupils have missed school too often in the past.
- You have ensured that attendance is given a high priority. Well-judged actions have helped pupils attend more regularly. You monitor pupils' rates of attendance closely. This ensures that families of those pupils who struggle to attend school every day receive appropriate support. As a result, the rates of absence for these

pupils are reducing. Overall attendance for the school has also improved and is above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the newly introduced systems for assessment in subjects other than English and mathematics are firmly established and used to identify where pupils make best progress and where this needs to be better.

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 Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together, you and I visited all classes across the school. I observed teaching and learning, looked at pupils' work and spoke informally with pupils. I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection, outcomes for pupils and the impact of decisions leaders have made. We also discussed pupils' attendance and your role as one of the school's designated safeguarding leads. I met with your English leader, who also leads on the wider curriculum. I met with a group of governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with a representative from the local authority to discuss its work with the school. I spoke with a group of pupils more formally to talk about their school experience.

Additionally, I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including: the school's improvement plans; leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness; your records of monitoring and evaluation; minutes of governing body meetings; and the school's assessment information for all year groups.

I also looked at the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. Furthermore, I took into account the 73 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and the 73 free-text responses from parents. I also analysed the 43 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and the 17 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.