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Mr Adrian Clements
Head of School
Marldon Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Clements

Short inspection of Marldon Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 June 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 has benefited from its close links with other schools in the federation, providing opportunities for staff to share best practice and expertise. This has been particularly successful in securing improvements in mathematics, resulting in a sharp increase in pupils' progress.

You take close consideration of staff well-being and teachers' workload. The school's method of providing feedback to pupils considers current research and evidence to ensure that it has a positive impact on helping pupils to continually improve. Your preferences are that teachers engage in high-quality dialogue with pupils to discuss progress and next steps. This approach has been effectively embedded across the school and most pupils make strong progress from their starting points. Teachers are positive about this approach and value your efforts to reduce their workload.

Some parents have mixed views about the school's effectiveness. There are several parents who feel that bullying is a problem within the school and that leaders do not deal effectively with these occurrences. Pupils in school behave extremely well. They engage well in lessons, showing high levels of respect for one another and demonstrating positive attitudes. Leaders log behavioural incidents, should they occur. However, incidents are few, and rarely are these deemed to be serious in nature. Leaders are working hard to ensure that pupils are clear about what constitutes bullying through the 'STOP' approach, 'several times on purpose'.

Pupils enjoy school. They engage well in lessons and are keen to share their achievements. Pupils are confident and take on challenging activities without fear of failure. At the previous inspection, an area identified for improvement was to ensure that pupils' handwriting was neat and that their work was well presented. Leaders have introduced clear expectations on presentation and encourage pupils to use cursive-style handwriting in their books. Pupils' books are well presented, and their handwriting is more developed. Pupils work hard in lessons because they are engaged and motivated to learn. As a result, pupils' attendance is above the national average, with very few pupils persistently absent.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that recruitment processes are robust. As a result, they carry out the required checks to ensure that they only appoint staff that are suitable to work with children. Once appointed, staff access an in-depth induction which makes clear the importance of safeguarding children. This ensures that staff are left with no doubt about their roles and responsibilities. Leaders provide ongoing training for all staff, keeping staff up to date with statutory guidance as well as with national and local initiatives.

Staff are vigilant in recognising concerns about pupils' welfare and these concerns are passed on to leaders without delay. Leaders collate this information effectively. As well as concerns raised in school, leaders speak positively about Operation Encompass and the role it has in sharing vital information about pupils. Leaders' tight grip on concerns about pupils means they can take proportionate decisions about whether to involve external agencies. Consequently, pupils are safe in school and staff act effectively to maintain pupils' welfare.

Governors keep a watchful eye on safeguarding across the school. They ensure that the school's single central register is compliant and kept up to date, while also considering how frequently concerns about pupils' welfare are raised and subsequent actions taken by leaders in light of these concerns.

Inspection findings

- Firstly, I considered the progress that pupils across key stage 2 make in writing, particularly pupils with high prior attainment. In 2017, these pupils made poor progress from their starting points. While progress has improved, the proportion of pupils reaching greater depth by the end of key stage 2 sits just below national average.
- Pupils benefit from engaging lessons. Teachers are effective in sparking pupils' interests, using high-quality resources to capture pupils' imaginations. Pupils enjoy sharing their ideas with one another, particularly ambitious vocabulary. Teachers use effective questioning to probe pupils' understanding and facilitate meaningful discussions. Pupils' increasing vocabulary means that they can work out the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases. For example, pupils used their knowledge of what a lumberjack is to work out the meaning of a lumber trail.

Pupils' are more confident to use newly learned words in their own writing. As a result, pupils' writing is interesting and captures readers' interests.

- Pupils' writing books show they have plenty of opportunities to write across a range of subjects and genres. Pupils make strong progress in writing. Teachers find out how well pupils write at the beginning of a writing topic, using this assessment information effectively to provide lessons for further development. Pupils' writing shows how they are taking on board new learning and applying this successfully. One aspect of pupils' writing that teachers have found harder to improve is pupils' application of spelling. Leaders have introduced a recent approach to providing pupils with feedback and targets when spelling errors occur. While this is having an impact on pupils' awareness of spelling strategies, errors remain.
- Secondly, I considered how well pupils with average prior attainment make progress in mathematics so that more pupils are working at the higher standard. Over the last few years, pupils' progress in mathematics has rapidly improved. In 2016, pupils' progress was poor. Leaders recognised that part of this was due to a lack of consistency in how teachers taught mathematics across the school. Leaders' actions to remedy this have been successful.
- Pupils are keen mathematicians. They strive to do well and embrace challenge. Pupils take part in activities that are meaningful to them. They do not see activities as isolated learning, but as knowledge to help them in life. For example, pupils worked out the cost of a series of rides at 'Wonka land'. Through leaders' introduction of 'progress pathways', pupils know how well they are doing and where they are aiming for in their learning.
- In each class, the approach to teaching mathematics is in line with leaders' intent. Pupils access a rich mathematics curriculum with regular opportunities to develop their fluency, reasoning and problem-solving knowledge. The curriculum is organised into specific units such as 'place value' or 'addition and subtraction'. At the beginning of each unit, teachers assess pupils to find out what they already know. Teachers use this information to inform the activities they provide to pupils. While this is mainly successful, there are occasions where some pupils find mathematical activities too challenging. This is because teachers set targets for pupils that are not precise enough. Consequently, pupils do not have the knowledge to answer these questions correctly.
- Finally, I considered how staff in the Reception class engage boys in reading and writing. Over time, children leave the Reception class well-prepared for key stage 1. The proportion of children achieving the early learning goals across the early years framework is above the national average. However, the proportion of children, particularly boys, attaining the early learning goals in reading and writing has been lower than in other areas. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been restricted by reading and writing.
- The Reception class is a warm and inviting learning space. Children are familiar with routines and transition confidently between the indoor and outdoor provision. Staff provide lots of opportunities for children to develop their writing. These activities are well resourced and suitably matched to the emerging needs

of the children. However, many boys opt to engage with activities outside rather than write inside. Staff have acted to provide opportunities for children to write outside but, as yet, children do not consistently use these.

- Children's writing records show that children with skills below what is typical practise developing their writing less frequently than their peers, regardless of gender. This limits the progress they make from their starting points. On the other hand, their peers regularly practise and refine their writing, resulting in strong progress. Consequently, the gap between children with skills below what is typical and their peers widens.
- In reading, children access phonics immediately. The classroom acts as a high-quality phonics resource for children: key sounds that children are learning are displayed clearly and are accessible. Phonics sessions are pacy, rigorous and engaging. Staff use time well and sessions are matched well to children's emerging needs. Staff assess children regularly during these sessions, using this information to help guide children when they need more support. As a result of this effective work, the proportion of pupils that meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been above the national average in recent years. Leaders' efforts to ensure that children learn to read from an early age are paying off.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in the Reception class engage more frequently with indoor and outdoor writing activities, particularly lower-attaining children and boys
- pupils apply spelling strategies more accurately in their writing
- teachers set precise targets for pupils based on gaps in their knowledge and use this information to provide suitable activities.

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

Yours sincerely

Nathan Kemp
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I conducted all inspection activities alongside you and school leaders. I met with you, the special educational needs coordinator, the assistant headteacher and the mathematics leader. Due to staff absence, I met with early years staff from the federation, rather than the school, when considering children's learning. I also spoke to representatives of the governing body and the executive

headteacher. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils and scrutinised the work in pupils' writing and mathematics books. I considered leaders' information about current pupils' progress. Furthermore, I met with the designated leader for safeguarding.

I looked at a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation and discussed the school's current improvement priorities. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records. I took account of 85 responses to the online survey, Parent View. I also considered nine responses to the staff survey.