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Mr Neil Baldwin  
Interim Academy Headteacher  
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Mendham  
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Dear Mr Baldwin

### **Short inspection of Mendham Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Your school has a strong, caring ethos that is rightly valued by pupils, staff and parents. Older pupils act responsibly and compassionately towards their younger schoolmates throughout the school day. Younger pupils copy these helpful behaviours and contribute equally towards the school's positive atmosphere. Staff are proud of the pupils. They are committed to providing them with the best possible opportunities, both in the classroom and through a range of extra-curricular clubs, trips and residential visits.

Through your federation with another local primary school, and because of your membership of the Consortium multi-academy trust, you have ensured that pupils and staff benefit from a wider range of opportunities and experiences than they would otherwise receive. For example, pupils participate in joint curriculum days and compete in combined sports teams. Staff value the subject leadership positions that have developed across the federation. They are also grateful for the high-quality training and support that they receive through the trust.

Pupils behave well. They have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to show examples in their workbooks where they are making strong progress. They enjoy coming to school and get on well with each other and with school staff. Parents are

equally positive about the school. All parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, stated that they would recommend the school to other parents. One parent, reflecting the views of others, commented, 'Our son is treated as an individual in an extremely caring, organised and inspiring environment.'

The school has maintained its strengths since the inspection of the predecessor school. Leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses, while priorities for improvement are appropriate. Leadership has been enhanced across the federation, the quality of teaching has improved, and staff now receive a higher quality of training. Pupils' progress in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 has been positive for the last three years. Although pupils' progress has not been as strong in mathematics, it is improving.

The locality committee and the trust board provide you and your leaders with effective support and challenge. They know the school well and have a wide and appropriate range of skills. Locality committee members support the school's development through their contributions at locality committee meetings and their routine visits to meet school leaders. They ensure that both schools in the federation work together for everyone's benefit. However, the ability of the locality committee and the trust board to evaluate the school's work and hold leaders to account is sometimes weakened because the expected outcomes in the school's improvement plan are not always clear and measurable.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Locality committee members have a clear understanding of their safeguarding duties and are effective in carrying them out. You and your leaders undertake all appropriate checks on staff, which a nominated member of the locality committee scrutinises routinely. Your staff are well trained. They know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk and what actions to take should they have any concerns. Your staff understand the school's safeguarding systems and they say that safeguarding is a part of the school's culture. Safeguarding records are well kept, and any child protection referrals are monitored closely.

All parents who responded to Parent View agreed that pupils are safe, happy and well looked after at school. Pupils also said that they are well supported by the adults in the school. They said that, on the rare occasions it happens, bullying is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils talked positively about how they are taught to stay safe through lessons and assemblies that cover topics such as water safety, road safety and staying safe online.

## Inspection findings

- I pursued several lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. My first considered how effectively leaders are ensuring that current pupils in key stage 2 make strong progress in mathematics.
- Leaders have identified the reasons why pupils' progress in mathematics has been weaker than in reading and writing. These included the need to develop teachers' subject knowledge and to provide pupils with more opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to different types of problems. Teachers have received a range of additional training that has improved their practice. In addition, alongside colleagues from across the federation, teachers now plan more closely and check the quality of pupils' work more effectively. New strategies have been introduced to help improve pupils' progress in mathematics. For example, pupils now use a wider range of resources to help them to work out the solutions to more-complex problems.
- Pupils' overall progress in mathematics is improving across key stage 2 because the quality of teaching is improving. Learning activities generally provide pupils with sufficient levels of challenge. Pupils enjoy, and respond well to, the tasks that their teachers set them. Teachers question pupils well and they use their improving subject knowledge to provide them with helpful advice about how to improve their work. Although pupils' overall progress is improving, not all year groups are progressing with equal vigour. This is because teachers do not consistently ensure that all pupils rise to the challenges of fully explaining their ideas or applying what they have learned to different mathematical problems.
- My second line of enquiry was about how successfully you and your leaders are improving the quality of teaching so that it supports the progress of the most able pupils throughout the school. Teachers receive high-quality training that has included sessions focused on improving the depth of pupils' writing and their ability to solve complex mathematical problems. The evaluation of the quality of teaching is now more effective, and teachers receive regular, helpful feedback from federation and trust staff. Regular pupil progress meetings track the performance of the most able pupils and teachers provide additional support for pupils if they fall behind where they should be.
- Most-able pupils make strong progress when teachers devise activities that are closely matched to their prior learning. Their understanding is deepened further when teachers and teaching assistants provide them with additional challenge through high-quality questioning that makes them think deeply and improve their work. The majority of the school's most-able pupils make progress that is in line with, and in some cases better than, leaders' expectations. However, not all most-able pupils are making strong enough progress. Teachers do not always challenge them to produce the standard of work they could. Some pupils said that activities can be too easy and that they would prefer to move onto more difficult tasks sooner.
- Finally, I checked how effectively you and your leaders support the transition of the high number of pupils who join the school during the school year. Leaders' provision for new pupils when they join the school is effective. Arrangements for

pupils and parents to visit the school are well established and ensure that pupils get off to a good start at Mendham. Gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are quickly identified and pupils receive a range of support to catch up, should they require it. Staff know pupils very well, and the strong support offered to all pupils at the school ensures that any new starters are made to feel welcome. They quickly become a part of the 'school family'.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- embed and develop leaders' actions to ensure that pupils' progress in mathematics continues to improve
- strengthen the progress of the most able pupils by ensuring that all teachers take sufficient account of pupils' starting points when planning, leading and supporting learning activities
- improve the rigour of improvement planning by including clear and measurable outcomes that enable leaders, locality committee members and trustees to evaluate the school's progress more effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Gee  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, other school leaders and staff, and two groups of pupils. I also met with locality committee members, trustees and the trust's education and learning manager. I visited a range of classes to observe teaching, look at pupils' books and to see them at work. I scrutinised the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, its development plan and other documentation, including the record of pre-employment checks and child protection records. I considered the 23 responses from parents to Parent View, alongside the 15 free-text responses.