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Mrs Hannah Wheatcroft  
Executive Headteacher  
Rickling Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School  
Rickling Green  
Saffron Walden  
Essex  
CB11 3YG

Dear Mrs Wheatcroft

### **Short inspection of Rickling Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 the school was judged to be good in October 2015.

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

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

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2018, you and your newly formed senior leadership team have quickly shown that they have a clear idea of where there are strengths in the school and where improvements could be made. Your new team is demonstrating enthusiasm, energy and an eagerness to improve pupils' achievement and their well-being.

You are ably supported by governors and by the local authority. Both have great confidence in you and other leaders. Governors are very knowledgeable and understand the importance of both challenging and supporting you.

In the short time since you have been in post, you have secured the trust of parents who know that the school is in good hands. All parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire and those who spoke to me would recommend the school. Typical of parental comments was, 'Rickling is a wonderful school with a particularly friendly and nurturing atmosphere.' Parents said staff are professional, approachable and respond well to their concerns. They say their children are very happy and enthusiastic about school.

Leaders, including governors, have continued to maintain the good quality of teaching since the last inspection. Teaching in the early years, and key stages 1 and

2, has remained good.

Leaders have ensured that the high standards of personal development, behaviour and welfare have also been maintained since the previous inspection. Typically, pupils enjoy interesting lessons and show they enjoy learning. They try extremely hard to do their best and behave well at all times. Pupils show respect to adults and to each other. Older children look after the younger ones when they are at play and as they move around the school.

Since the last inspection, the school has improved outcomes for pupils, including for the most able. In the early years, an above-average proportion of children typically reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. Similarly, in Year 1, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics is high. The proportions of pupils attaining greater depth and higher standards at key stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics are consistently high.

You have correctly identified that while there are some very exciting, enriching aspects of the curriculum, subjects other than English and mathematics (the foundation subjects) are not taught as systematically.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your staff ensure a strong culture of safeguarding pupils. Staff training is up to date. Members of staff I spoke to demonstrated that they understand how to keep pupils safe. You ensure that the concerns they raise are followed up in a timely manner. Since your arrival, you have refined the procedures for recording child protection concerns. This has led to records being kept meticulously.

The single central record meets requirements. You make careful checks on the suitability of adults applying to work at the school, including volunteers. Governors check to ensure that safeguarding documents are well maintained and meet requirements.

Pupils feel safe and know how to keep safe. They have a well-developed understanding of keeping safe when using the internet. The pupils I spoke to understood why they should not play online games with strangers. They were aware of potential 'scams' and knew not to give out their personal details to anyone.

Parents and pupils confirmed that this is a school where bullying rarely happens. Pupils showed they have a good understanding of what is meant by bullying. Staff ensure that pupils are aware of what to do and who to approach if they have any concerns.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on how effectively leaders have ensured that the most able pupils achieve well, particularly in mathematics. While pupils' standards in mathematics are consistently high at both key stages, the progress of most pupils

by the end of key stage 2 is broadly average. Soon after you joined the school, you commissioned a review of teaching and learning to tackle this. This confirmed your view that pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to develop their mathematical reasoning skills.

- You have acted promptly on the recommendations of the review. As a result, teachers have recently implemented new, more systematic approaches to develop pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics. This is leading to improvement. When we visited classes and looked at pupils' workbooks, I noted that, currently, pupils are making good progress in mathematics. I also found that pupils are being provided with more opportunities to prove how they reached their answers and to demonstrate their thinking. At times though, reasoning is only used as an extension activity. This means that less-able pupils in particular, do not get enough opportunities to try these tasks and develop their reasoning skills.
- Next, I looked at how effectively leaders have organised the curriculum to improve pupils' progress. The impact of effective teaching is clearly evident in pupils' books in each class. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 have developed their writing skills well by looking at visual resources to inspire them to write descriptively. Teachers' questions help pupils to broaden their vocabulary and create interesting phrases such as, 'suddenly, the sky changed from orange to red, exploding in a blaze of colour'. Pupils' books also show that those pupils who are working below their age-related targets for attainment in English and mathematics are catching up quickly. This is because they are provided with well-targeted support.
- Pupils enjoy a broad range of activities across the curriculum. Events such as 'M' days in the woods to promote mental health and well-being, where pupils and staff experience things starting with the letter 'm', such as music, meditation and marshmallows are proving to be great fun. Other similar events, such as 'Welly Wednesdays' and 'Fresh Air Fridays' enhance the enjoyment and well-being of pupils. This contributes extremely well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The pupils who met with me were able to recall many facts about a previous topic on the First and Second World War, and did so with great enthusiasm. However, evidence from pupils' workbooks in Years 5 and 6 shows that the curriculum coverage in history, geography and science is patchy. Consequently, pupils are not as well prepared for the next stage in their education in these subjects as they are in English and mathematics.
- I looked closely at the quality of leadership and management. The actions taken by leaders to make improvements have maintained the good quality of education provided for pupils. Your leadership is enthusing other staff to lead improvements. For example, the science leader is improving the outside environment by developing the garden and allotment areas.
- Staff have sustained the high standards of cooperation, consideration and positive behaviour shown by pupils. They are polite and behave extremely well in lessons and in school generally. They show highly positive attitudes to learning, listen attentively to instructions and respond favourably to adult guidance.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- reasoning lies at the heart of the mathematics curriculum and pupils are given ample opportunities to practise these skills
- pupils are as fully prepared for the next stage in their education in foundation subjects as they are in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Warboys  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I held discussions with you and the deputy headteacher about the progress made since the previous inspection and my key lines of enquiry. I noted your evaluation of the quality of education, plans for improvement and information about how well pupils currently in the school are achieving.

I also met with two of the school's designated leaders for safeguarding to review child protection procedures. I discussed with you and the deputy headteacher the effectiveness of pupil premium spending and heard how you are currently revising the curriculum.

I looked at minutes of governing body meetings and spoke to three governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I held a conversation with a representative from the local authority.

I observed pupils at play during breaktime and met with a group of the most able pupils from Years 1 to 6 to talk about their learning and other experiences at school.

I took account of the 49 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 47 free-text responses from parents and talked to parents as they brought their children to school.