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Mrs Anne-Marie Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Short inspection of St Katherine's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 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 November 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since then, you and your leadership team have taken direct action to address the areas identified as next steps and these have now become strengths of the school. Staff work as a close-knit team and all have high expectations of what pupils should achieve. Teachers have taken on new initiatives with enthusiasm and this has raised the progress and attainment standards of pupils.

St Katherine's is a happy school, with close links to the community it serves. The church and school share the site, which helps promote the Christian values you encourage. Pupils behave well. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. Pupils work hard in their lessons and want to learn. At breaktimes, they play energetically with the range of equipment on offer.

Most parents are very pleased with the work of the school and believe their children are happy and safe. You create many opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's education, with a variety of parent workshops and assemblies on a regular basis. You listen closely to parental feedback and, where possible, make changes, for example making the library open to families after school.

Pupils like their school. They really appreciate the extra support they get if they are struggling in their work and understand that this can be for any child, not just those who have additional needs. They say that there is no bullying in the school. Pupils

were clear that if they did have a rare disagreement with another pupil, they could rely on any member of staff to sort it out quickly.

The governing body is actively involved in the life of the school. Governors, too, are ambitious for what pupils can achieve. They each take a focus area of the school's work to monitor, challenge and support, which results in governors having a very detailed knowledge of all aspects of the school's work.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Safeguarding knowledge forms a regular part of staff training. It is an agenda item in all meetings. You ensure that all staff know what risks pupils may face and check on their knowledge with informal 'quizzes'. Staff are very clear about their own responsibilities for reporting any concerns.

The very few concerns that you have received have been dealt with effectively. All appropriate checks on staff and other adults regularly in the school have been completed and these are routinely checked by governors.

Inspection findings

- I identified some lines of enquiry to check whether the school remains good and agreed these with you at the start of the inspection. Firstly, I considered how leaders had enabled teachers to improve their own practice. Since the last inspection, you have developed staff development to now be of a very high standard. The quality of learning from pupils reflects the strong standard of teaching.
- All teachers and support staff have professional learning partners. They have dedicated time out of class to watch each other teaching or supporting pupils. They take time to discuss what they find and together identify next steps for improvement and how to meet these. All staff I spoke to were clear on how valuable this was to their own development. It is clear from pupils' books that teachers continue to improve their own practice.
- You also work closely with other schools in the diocese and local cluster. This has given teachers and support staff, including those who do not work directly with pupils, the opportunity to meet with colleagues elsewhere and share good practice.
- Your and other leaders' self-evaluation of the school is accurate, and the development plan is detailed in terms of what the various actions and intended results will look like for different stakeholders, from pupils through to governors and parents. This has enabled staff to be confident about their individual roles in school improvement.
- Curriculum development is currently an area that you and other leaders are working on. You have consulted with teachers about their own subject confidence and have arranged for specific subject training in areas such as fieldwork, design and technology, and science to address where they are less

confident.

- I considered how the school is using interventions for pupils and if this is effective use of additional funding. Since the previous inspection, teachers have moved to mainly use a 'post-teaching' model of intervention. This is work on the same day, with a teaching assistant, to fill gaps where pupils have not succeeded in the day's learning or to work on misconceptions that have become apparent.
- Pupils and parents both expressed their appreciation for this system and noted that all pupils benefit from it. Pupils' books show that they have fewer gaps and where they have not understood something, they quickly begin to make progress. Where pupils do need additional support, or have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), support in the classroom is of a good standard. There are some highly targeted catch-up programmes and the impact of these is closely monitored.
- We looked together at the quality of mathematics teaching in key stage 2. This was because the average scaled score and progress made at the end of key stage 2 had declined in 2017 from 2018. Since the previous inspection, the school has adopted a 'mastery' approach to teaching mathematics. There is a high emphasis on developing fluency in using number and problem-solving skills.
- Pupils' work showed that most are making strong progress towards where they should be for their age. It is clear that teachers are encouraging the use of practical apparatus and pictorial representations, in line with school policy. Pupils are asked to reason about number; however, most are not yet confident to explain their thinking or use specific mathematical vocabulary to do so. Teachers are developing their own confidence in modelling this to pupils.
- I looked at how teachers and leaders are enabling pupils in key stage 1, particularly boys, to make good progress in their writing. This was because boys attained an average standard well below that of girls in key stage 1 in 2018, and writing was the lowest subject in terms of attainment at the same stage.
- There has been a recent high focus on use of vocabulary across the school. This was immediately evident in pupils' writing, with Year 2 pupils regularly using words such as 'evacuated' and 'horrifying'. Teachers have carefully considered the contexts and texts they are using to ensure that they do not lose interest from any pupil. Consequently, pupils in key stage 1 are highly enthusiastic to write. Their writing is imaginative (for example, combining Noah's Ark, dinosaurs and the Titanic in one story) and they have the stamina to write at length.
- Pupils' use of punctuation in key stage 1 is not as developed as it could be and the structure of sentences is often incorrect. Teachers are aware that some pupils have poorer pencil grip and are working with them to improve their writing style and presentation.
- Finally, I looked at the quality of the early years provision, particularly in developing early writing. This was because the proportion of children who have achieved a good level of development has fallen over the last three years, with writing being the lowest area. Leaders have identified this as due to poorer speech and language skills from some children on entry. As a result, they have put in place additional speech and language support from a trained assistant.

- The early years leader is clear on the need to develop the fine and gross motor skills needed for early writing, together with phonic knowledge, as appropriate for each stage. In both the Nursery and Reception classes, it was evident that there is an emphasis on these skills. Topics being studied lead to a variety of opportunities, for example in Nursery mark-making on a beanstalk and in Reception making recycling posters.
- Inside the classrooms, staff target children's skill development very well, both at specific times, such as early phonics work, and when children might be unfocused, for example encouraging children to engage in a printing activity developing fine motor skills. Children are extremely happy and settled. They enjoy the many interesting activities on offer.
- This skill development is not developed as strongly in the outside areas. There were some opportunities for writing or mark-making in Reception, such as chalk on the floor and walls, but fewer in Nursery. In both, adults engaged with the children in play, but did not make use of opportunities for writing in the same effective way as inside.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers further develop pupils' ability to explain their reasoning in mathematics, including use of subject-specific language
- pupils in key stage 1 gain greater understanding of how to use sentence construction and punctuation to support the structure of their writing
- adults in the early years create additional opportunities for play outside that encourage development of fine motor skills and early writing.

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

Tessa Holledge
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

You and I discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's own evaluation of its performance, progress since the last inspection and information about current provision in the school.

We discussed procedures for safeguarding and I examined the single central record of pre-employment checks on staff.

I spoke with parents on the playground. I considered the 86 responses submitted to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the 22 responses to the staff survey and the 49 responses to the pupil survey.

We visited classrooms together, some several times. We looked at a wide range of pupils' work, in class and out of class, across subjects and abilities. I met with the deputy headteacher, senior leaders and also other staff. I met with a group of pupils formally and spoke to pupils in class and outside on the playground at lunchtime. I also met with the diocesan adviser and representatives of the governing body.