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Mrs Julia Waters
Headteacher
Palgrave Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Waters

Short inspection of Palgrave Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

Leaders, staff and governors are firmly committed to providing pupils with the best possible opportunities, both in and out of the classroom. Your aim is 'to give every pupil every chance in life'. You and your staff do this by ensuring that pupils study a wide range of well-taught subjects. The curriculum is strengthened by routine educational visits and high-quality extra-curricular clubs. You have not let the small school site limit your ambition. Pupils benefit from the links that you have built up with local sports clubs. As a consequence, they are able to participate in a large number of sporting activities. Your commitment to the arts is also valued highly by pupils. Pupils enjoy participating in the annual whole-school production. Year 4 pupils are also grateful for the opportunity to learn a musical instrument for a year.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. Pupils enjoy school and they develop very strong relationships both with their teachers and with other pupils of all ages. Pupils talk very positively about the school's values and they can explain clearly how they are encouraged to live them out each day. One pupil, discussing the current value of perseverance, simply stated, 'You have to try and try again, never give up.'

Pupils' positive views of the school are shared by their parents and by the staff. Staff say that they enjoy working at the school, that it is well led and that they are very well supported. The overwhelming majority of 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: 'The whole school community respects one another and there is a great sense of togetherness. As parents, we are delighted with the experience our children are having in their primary school years here at Palgrave.'

The school has continued to improve over time. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, while priorities for improvement are appropriate. Leaders have ensured that there have been significant improvements in the teaching of phonics. Pupils' attainment in the phonics screening check, both at the end of Year 1 and 2, is above national averages. Overall improvements in the quality of teaching have also ensured that pupils achieve very well by the time that they leave the school. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 is consistently above average.

Governors and trustees provide you with effective support and challenge. They know the school very well, and they are committed to its continued improvement. Governors support the school's development through their contributions at school governance committee meetings and their routine visits to meet school leaders. Trustees are also very effective in providing an additional layer of support and challenge. For example, the trust's principal routinely reviews the quality of teaching alongside you and your staff. Trustees have also ensured that there is sufficient depth in leadership capacity in the school to support you, as you take on the leadership of an additional school within the trust.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors have a clear understanding of their safeguarding duties and are effective in carrying them out. You and your staff undertake all appropriate checks on staff, which the chair of the school governance committee scrutinise 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.

The overwhelming majority of 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 bullying, healthy relationships and staying safe online.

Inspection findings

- I pursued several lines of enquiry to ascertain the extent of the school's improvement. My first considered how far high-quality teaching was ensuring that pupils make strong progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders have ensured that there has been a continued focus on improving the quality of teaching. Their priorities for improvement, for example supporting pupils' ability to explain their mathematical thinking, have been appropriately identified and well communicated to staff. Staff training is very effective. Teachers say the support and guidance that they receive have helped them improve their practice. Leaders have ensured that their focus on high-quality teaching has not been targeted solely on English and mathematics. Subjects such as physical education, art, drama and music have a very high profile within the school.
- The quality of teaching across the curriculum is consistently strong. Leaders have high expectations that teachers implement consistently. For example, pupils in all classes are provided with opportunities to edit their own work. They do this thoughtfully, accurately, and in a way that is very effective in helping them improve the quality of their extended writing. Teachers have very strong subject knowledge, and they use it to question pupils well. They clarify misconceptions quickly and challenge pupils to think deeply about the subject matter.
- Teachers are also successful in helping pupils to see the links between subjects. For example, pupils in Year 2 and 3 understood clearly how they were applying their mathematical skills to their study of science. Pupils said that they enjoy the wide range of subjects that they are taught, and they can explain how they are making strong progress. They say that all subjects are valued equally in the school. While leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics is strong, new leaders are not yet as highly effective as their more experienced colleagues.
- My second line of enquiry was about how successfully leaders are ensuring that children's levels of attainment continue to remain high in early years. Leaders have a very clear vision of effective early years practice, which they implement successfully. They observe children's learning very closely and are quick to identify barriers that children face. Children's progress is monitored routinely. Consequently, adults continually review and develop the curriculum throughout the year to ensure that it meets children's developmental needs.
- Children continue to make strong overall progress across early years. They enjoy the range of well-designed learning opportunities that adults provide them with, and they have very positive attitudes to learning. Children have very strong relationships with each other and with adults. Adults question children very well in formal sessions and when they are playing. This enables children to think about things in different ways, to deepen their understanding and to develop their skills. Although children's overall progress is strong, the most able children are not always provided with enough challenge to make the progress they should.

- Finally, I checked how effectively you and your leaders are ensuring that pupils' progress in mathematics is as strong as it is in reading and writing. The improvements that leaders have brought about in the overall quality of teaching are evident in the progress that current pupils are making in mathematics. Leaders' drive to ensure that pupils are challenged both to explain their thinking and to apply their mathematical knowledge to different problems is evident in pupils' workbooks. Pupils' work is checked routinely, and they are provided with targeted support if necessary. Pupils say that they enjoy mathematics and that they find it challenging. Current pupils are making strong overall progress in mathematics, and their attainment is high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- adults provide the most able children in early years with additional challenge so that they make substantial and sustained progress over time
- they continue to provide new subject leaders with the support, training and challenge that will enable them to work with the same high levels of impact as their more experienced colleagues.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, 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 a group of pupils. I also met with governors, trustees and the trust's principal. I visited all 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 30 responses from parents to Parent View, alongside the 27 free-text responses.