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Mrs Emma Smart
Headteacher
St Nicolas CofE Aided Infant School
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Dear Mrs Smart

Short inspection of St Nicolas CofE Aided Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 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 December 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Several prominent changes to staffing, within both senior leadership and governance tiers, have not hindered the school's improvement journey. This is because you set clear expectations, aim high and motivate those around you. Your leadership is thoughtful, reflective and astute.

Since your appointment, expertise at all levels has strengthened considerably and triggered greater energy and purpose. You have the full support of the school's community of governors, staff, parents and pupils and all speak highly of the impact of your leadership. All are unequivocal in their praise, noting the many improvements you have instigated quickly and securely. In everyone's eyes your leadership continues to play a pivotal role in the school's success.

Your school improvement plan brings together your thorough analysis of what the school could do even better. Your mantra that 'childhood is precious' weaves through the school's approach to pupils' learning and well-being, ensuring that pupils at St Nicolas learn well and thrive. This is a happy school where everyone is valued. Staff are appreciative of leaders' attentiveness to their work-life balance and exhibit high levels of confidence in leaders' decision-making. Parents enthuse about their children's early experience of schooling. They are particularly positive about the school's curriculum, with its emphasis on pupils' well-being and their development of a strong moral code. Pupils can explain terms such as wisdom and unity clearly and articulately. One parent commented: 'I cannot thank the school and teachers enough for all their support to encourage, motivate and inspire my

child to do well and give him confidence that he now demonstrates'. Another parent noted, 'The inclusion of well-being classes has been of great benefit to the children.' Pupils, too, enthuse about learning, their friends and their day-to-day experiences. One pupil in Year 2 commented: 'It's a brilliant school. All the people in it are kind and they care about each other. And everyone works in unity, so they can help each other to learn'.

Pupils achieve well. In 2018, the proportion of pupils in key stage 1 who achieved age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics was above that seen nationally. In early years, children achieve well across all areas of learning. The proportion who attained a good level of development in 2018 was above that seen nationally. Nevertheless, you and I agree that more pupils in key stage 1 can achieve at greater depth and build more strongly on the secure start that they receive during the early years.

At the time of the last inspection, it was reported that school improvement planning was a strength. You have built upon this strength, distributing leadership responsibilities more widely, so that other leaders contribute strongly to the school's development. Over the last two years, you have established middle leadership roles and staff now oversee particular aspects of the curriculum more closely, such as mathematics and phonics. Middle leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They monitor their subjects closely and are skilled at reviewing and adapting the school's approach. For example, this year, the mathematics leader has introduced a mastery approach. Pupils now use mathematical language confidently to reason and explain their thinking when solving problems. Nevertheless, middle leaders know that their analysis of performance information is at an early stage. They rightly identify that becoming more proficient at spotting trends and patterns, such as for groups, is the next onward step in their own professional development.

You have made notable strides in addressing the areas for improvement identified at your previous inspection. First, at the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to develop the monitoring skills and expertise of the governing body. Governors now make regular visits to the school, undertaking focused visits linked to school improvement priorities. This is helpful as governors now gather first-hand information for themselves. Second, you were asked to set more ambitious targets related to pupils' achievement in the Year 1 phonics screening check. You have reviewed the school's approach and tracked this aspect carefully. You have responded very positively to the dip in performance evident in 2017 and standards since have risen considerably. In 2018, the proportion of pupils who met the standard expected in the Year 1 phonics screening check was above that seen nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Since your arrival, you have strengthened policies and processes noticeably so that they now strongly underpin the school's approach to safeguarding. The school's policy meets requirements and adheres well to government guidance. All staff have

received the required level of training, including that relating to the 'Prevent' duty, and know how to spot any unusual signs that may be concerning. Leaders act promptly when necessary, including referring to wider agencies when appropriate.

Appropriate checks at the point of appointment are conducted on staff to check their suitability to work with children. Leaders also ensure that the wide range of external providers that work with the school, including within its extra-curricular programme, are appropriately vetted before working with children. During the inspection, leaders' attentiveness to this aspect was highly evident. I sampled the checks on temporary staff and found all had been put in place in a timely manner.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the teaching of early reading, the most able pupils' achievement in mathematics, and the effectiveness of leaders and governors at driving improvement.
- Leadership has strengthened considerably. You are passionate about ensuring that the school becomes more outward looking and draws on expertise from a wide range of sources. For instance, you have ensured that staff work together with other local schools to ensure that the school's performance information is accurate. Leaders, including those who are relatively new to role, have received useful training and support. You are in the process of extending this approach to all members of the team, including support staff. Staff say that the school values their own professional development. However, governance arrangements are less well established. Many governors are very new to role, and still need to hone their skills and expertise to become highly effective.
- Pupils are taught phonics regularly and systematically. They are adept at transferring their skills to their own writing and spelling accurately is high up on their own lists of accomplishments. Pupils write with a high degree of accuracy. In Year 2, pupils were able to write their own versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood', using a range of interesting and varied vocabulary accurately. Pupils write with fluency and flair, transferring their reading skills well to their own compositions.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. This year, under the leadership of the mathematics leader, the school has adapted its approach. Pupils are encouraged to reason and explain their thinking and are adept at using a range of tools to enable this to happen. The youngest pupils can confidently explore patterns in number, such as when exploring what happens when two odd numbers are added together. Pupils work methodically and can use visual representations to explore different possibilities. Skilled teaching assistants support pupils well in developing their mathematical skills and language securely.
- Building on the good start pupils receive in the early years, Year 1 pupils participate in a curriculum that aims to provide a continuous provision approach. Tasks are well planned and engage pupils' interest. Pupils thoroughly enjoy thinking mathematically and are keen to identify patterns and make predictions, including when finding fractions of amounts.

- Parents are highly satisfied with their children's experience. One parent, encapsulating the views of many, commented: 'I feel fortunate that my child is part of the "St Nics" family. What a fabulous introduction to learning!' Parents are delighted with a multitude of aspects such as the quality of teaching, the approachability of staff, the richness of the curriculum and the family atmosphere. They also appreciate the opportunities to engage regularly with staff, such as during the recent curriculum evening and speak enthusiastically of the usefulness of such events. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire would all recommend the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further accelerate the progress of the most able pupils so that more exceed age-related expectations in key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics
- continue to develop the expertise of governors so that school leaders are robustly held to account and challenged knowledgeably
- further evolve the skills and expertise of middle leaders so that they can identify for themselves patterns and trends in performance information.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your senior teacher, and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to a representative from the Diocese of Guildford on the telephone. I observed teaching and learning in every class jointly with the headteacher. I took account of 66 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 42 free-text comments. I considered 13 responses to the online survey for staff and 14 responses by pupils. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.