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Mrs Elizabeth Irvin
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Irvin

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

Following my visit to the school on 20 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead a happy, welcoming and caring team who provide a safe, nurturing environment for pupils. Across the school, pupils learn to be independent and to have confidence when work is challenging. Pupils' good behaviour is firmly rooted in the school's Christian ethos; pupils learn to value differences and to care for each other. They develop as resilient learners who strive to follow the school's motto, 'With God, all things are possible.'

You and your staff have planned an engaging and interesting curriculum. Teachers plan a wide variety of trips and visits to develop pupils' knowledge across different subjects. For example, pupils visit local galleries, museums and places of interest. Year 4 pupils visited Chester as part of their history topic on the Romans. Staff use the extensive school grounds to bring pupils' learning to life. As part of an English topic, Year 5 staff used the school's forest area to recreate a rural setting for war time evacuees to help pupils gain a real appreciation of life in war time. A wide variety of extra-curricular clubs, including yoga, netball and drama, are used to enhance pupils' well-being, enjoyment and skills. Year 5 and 6 pupils enjoy outdoor and adventurous residential trips each year. Though the enriched curriculum that you provide, pupils become more independent, confident and caring. These attributes contribute to their readiness for their next stage of education.

Your governing body share your ambitions for the school. They are keen for staff to build on recent improvements in mathematics and writing outcomes, so that pupils,

including the most able, build on the good progress that they make. Governors visit regularly and know the school well. They use their knowledge to provide a good balance of challenge and support for leaders. Governors keep a careful check on spending, including the impact of recent staff training on improving the quality of teaching. The school's improvement plan identifies accurate priorities for the school. However, the plan lacks sharpness and it is difficult to identify how success will be measured. This limits governors' ability to keep a close and accurate check on leaders' progress in school improvements, such as raising outcomes in writing at key stage 2.

You have developed an enthusiastic team of staff who welcome the training you give them to improve their skills. Staff work collaboratively to share their ideas and develop their expertise. Leaders use their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school to tailor ongoing professional development. This has ensured that the quality of teaching is good and that pupils achieve well. You have provided effective training for staff, including improving the quality of teaching reading. This has had a positive effect on improving outcomes for pupils.

Pupils are very proud of their school. In class, they try their best and follow teachers' instructions quickly. The pupils with whom I spoke described the school as safe and said that staff are kind, caring and fun. Pupils enjoy school and attend very regularly. Leaders provide a range of leadership roles for pupils, including the active school council. The pupil eco council encourage their peers to walk to school and to reduce waste. Pupil digital leaders help their classmates to keep safe online. Through such opportunities, pupils increase their confidence and make a valuable contribution to the school.

During the inspection, I found that pupils develop a good understanding of equalities. They learn to respect other cultures and ethnicities. As one pupil said, 'It doesn't matter if you are different.' However, pupils' knowledge and understanding of religions other than Christianity is limited.

Parents and carers share pupils very positive view of the school and would recommend it to others. Parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, praised the hardworking and caring staff. They value the availability of teachers and learning mentors at the start of each day. A typical comment by parents was, 'The school is a happy and safe place where children are challenged to be the best they can be.'

Leaders have given attention to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. You were asked to improve the consistency of teaching in reading, writing and mathematics so that pupils make rapid and sustained progress over time. You acknowledge that changes in staffing have led to some inconsistencies in teaching. You have addressed these by putting in place a wide range of professional development for staff, including in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders make very regular checks on teaching and learning to identify areas for further improvement. Staff are given frequent opportunities to share and observe good practice with each other and professionals in other schools. As a result of these

actions, progress and teaching are now good.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders place a high priority on keeping pupils safe and have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough and of high quality. Leaders undertake regular checks to ensure that systems are thorough. You provide very regular safeguarding training and briefings for staff. These ensure that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are alert to risks.

Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, both online and in the wider community. The learning mentors provide valuable support for vulnerable pupils. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that they can talk to a trusted adult about any concerns. The pupils with whom I spoke during the inspection said that bullying does not happen in school, and any incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with appropriately by adults.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I considered several key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to assess how well leaders develop children's early reading and writing skills in Reception. I found that the indoor and outdoor learning environments provide a wide range of interesting activities which capture children's interest and develop their skills. Bright and attractive books are available for children to read. Staff seize children's imagination by sharing stories very regularly. On my visit to the Reception classroom, children were listening with rapt attention as their teacher read a pirate story to them. Adults listen to children read regularly. Teachers plan exciting activities to inspire children to write. For example, children visited the school's forest area as part of their learning about Little Red Riding Hood, and this inspired their writing. Children's workbooks show that they write very regularly for a range of different purposes, developing their skills rapidly. As a result of the interesting and regular activities that staff plan, children make good progress in their reading and writing.
- During the inspection, I also looked at how well pupils develop their skills in writing in key stage 2. This was because in 2018, pupils' achievement in writing by the end of Year 6 was lower than in mathematics and reading. You have taken appropriate steps to improve the teaching of writing and standards have improved. Staff have attended training to improve their skills. As a result of this training, staff plan engaging lessons which inspire pupils to write. A wide range of quality texts are shared with pupils to help develop their ideas and use of language. Checks on pupils' workbooks show that pupils write for a range of different purposes. Pupils choose ambitious vocabulary to make their writing more interesting. They apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills with accuracy. However, I found that there is inconsistency in pupils' handwriting style and some pupils' handwriting is difficult to read and not well formed. The improvements that you have made to teaching writing across the school are recent and still embedding in some classes. Teachers are developing their skills further to ensure that standards in writing continue to rise, including for the most

able pupils. Overall progress is good but changes are embedding in some classes.

- Another focus for the inspection was to consider the effectiveness of mathematics teaching in key stage 1. This was because in 2018, pupils' attainment in mathematics at the end of Year 2 was lower than in reading and writing. Leaders have taken steps to improve the approach to teaching mathematics across the school. Through recent training, staff have developed their confidence and effectiveness in mathematics teaching. Pupils now practise their problem-solving and reasoning skills at the start of each lesson. Staff show pupils how to use their reasoning skills to solve challenging problems. As a result, pupils are growing in confidence in explaining their mathematical thinking. Pupils' workbooks show that they practise their written calculations regularly. The changes that you have made are having a positive impact and pupils' progress is good. Leaders are keeping a careful check on teaching and learning to ensure that these changes continue to improve progress in mathematics, including for the most able pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve the sharpness of school improvement planning to enable governors and leaders to check with greater accuracy the progress the school is making towards achieving its goals
- teachers embed the changes to the teaching of writing and mathematics, so that pupils' outcomes, including for the most able pupils, continue to improve
- teachers develop a consistent approach to teaching handwriting, so that more pupils write neatly and with a fluent style
- pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of other religions.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Stevens

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. I also met with eight governors, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke to a representative of the local authority. I met with nine pupils from key stage 2 and heard pupils from Years 2 and 6 read. I was accompanied with senior leaders to

classes to observe teaching and learning. We also looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils.

I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 38 responses to Parent View, including free-text responses. I also considered the 14 staff responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' attainment and progress, and records of pupils' behaviour. I also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe, safeguarding checks and attendance information. I undertook a review of the school's website.