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St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Bowers Gifford  
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Dear Mrs Wigmore

### **Short inspection of St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Bowers Gifford**

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 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 January 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have worked determinedly with your colleagues to create a school where pupils thrive and are happy. Staff and the governing board are extremely proud to belong to the school, which is a tribute to the very positive relationships that you have established. It is clear that you are all highly committed, and that morale is high. In this very inclusive learning environment, the school's six values of 'love, friendship, wisdom, respect, courage and perseverance' permeate all aspects of the school's work.

St Margaret's is a welcoming, caring school. Staff make every effort to ensure that any obstacles to learning that are placed in the way of its pupils are overcome. There is a very positive atmosphere in classrooms and teachers and support staff have consistently high expectations of pupils. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and eagerness and are happy learners, relishing all that the school has to offer them. Pupils receive a strong 'moral compass' as a result of effective personal, social, and health education. Pupils told me that, 'Everyone has learned how to respect each other and get along from all of our different backgrounds.'

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to respond more quickly to pupils' learning so that work is matched to different pupils' abilities. The school was also asked to ensure that pupils receive the same positive feedback for all subjects and not just English and mathematics. To your credit, these aspects

have been addressed successfully. Indeed, over the past three years, the school has built a track record of academic improvement, which has led the academy trust and local schools to seek your counsel and support. Leaders are not complacent and have plans securely in place to further enrich the curriculum to ensure the highest possible outcomes in all subjects.

Middle leaders have a sound grasp of their areas of responsibility and intensify the school's capacity to continuously make improvements. They play an important role in strengthening the consistency of the quality of teaching across the school. As they do so, they are well supported by senior leaders. They lead effectively on relevant sections of the school's strategic plan, which results in improving outcomes for pupils.

The governing board is well informed and has a clear overview of the school's effectiveness. Its members bring a range of professional skills to support the leadership of the school. You provide them with accessible information about the progress that pupils make. The board confirm this information through their regular visits to the school, external reports and through meetings with senior leaders. In addition, governors talk to pupils and parents regularly and seek their views. Consequently, the governing board is able to fully hold you and other leaders to account for your work.

Staff enjoy working at the school. This is partly because they benefit from your strong focus on their professional development. Discussions that I had with staff and written responses to the staff survey show that this is appreciated. Teachers often use their skills to support each other when improving specific aspects of their practice, especially through the school's 'professional partner programme'.

Parents are very happy with the school, which they find to be genuinely inclusive. They find teachers approachable and quick to address any concerns they might have. In the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, one parent expressed the views of many, writing, 'We are grateful for the way the school supports our children, helps them to grow and learn and encourages them to become independent.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training for staff is up to date and in line with the latest legal guidance. Staff and governors spoken with during the inspection had a secure understanding of the school's procedures and carry out their duties diligently.

You and your team ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are comprehensive, of a high quality and fastidiously maintained. Thorough checks are undertaken to ensure that all staff are safe to work with pupils. Your safeguarding team has worked effectively to embed a culture of vigilance among all staff.

All parents who responded to Parent View say that their children feel safe in school. Pupils told me that there is always a member of staff to speak to if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils feel that they have someone to go to if they feel worried or upset about anything. They told me that, 'Our teachers keep a beady eye on us to make sure that we are safe.' Pupils know how to stay safe online and what actions to take if they feel worried when using the internet.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look closely at certain areas of the school's work to ensure that the school had remained good. We explored: how well the curriculum is planned to ensure that pupils build knowledge, understanding and skills in each subject; how well leaders promote positive attendance; how well teachers plan work to meet the needs of all pupils; and how well leaders and governors spend the pupil premium grant to meet the needs of the disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils enjoy the curriculum and relish the opportunities you provide them with to immerse themselves in their learning. They highlighted a textiles project, the Egyptians, mathematics and studying desert animals as some of their favourite learning. They talked about the many trips and visitors into school you offer and how this helps them to learn. Older pupils told me that they would like to spend more time learning about the humanities as they are fun subjects.
- Analysis of pupils' work in books shows that the curriculum has a strong focus on values, which supports pupils' effective personal and social development and their positive relationships with adults and each other. Progress in different subjects varies because, in some subjects, teachers are not consistently building on the essential skills that pupils need in order to make consistently strong progress. This is particularly the case for geography and history.
- Children in the early years start school with speech, language and communication skills that are below those typical for their age. Through the school's recent focus on developing pupils' language, pupils are developing a broad vocabulary across all subjects. Teachers actively promote the use of subject-specific vocabulary, especially in their written work, and pupils say that they like this approach. It is too early to measure the impact of this initiative, but early indications, as seen in pupils' written work, are positive.
- The overall attendance of pupils has remained constant for several years and is in line with the national figure. Where attendance is low, you work well with the local authority and the families concerned to ensure that attendance is well managed.
- The proportion of pupils who miss school regularly is decreasing over time and analysis of current attendance information shows that this is still the case. You are relentless in the actions you take to improve attendance.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. This is because leaders ensure that they benefit from high-quality teaching. In addition, leaders use pupil premium funding in a thoughtful and targeted way to boost their progress where this is

needed. All pupils' progress is closely checked in regular meetings between teachers and leaders. These meetings focus on individual pupils who may not be making enough progress. You accept no excuses for lack of ambition for underperforming pupils and ensure that effective steps are taken to support these pupils.

- Throughout the school, teachers plan activities that meet the needs of individual pupils. For example, I observed a mathematics lesson where groups of pupils were ordering fractions, with different tasks being set appropriate to pupils' differing needs. This was common practice around the school. You told me that the introduction of a new system for staff and pupils to measure academic progress (learning ladders) has enabled leaders and staff to address gaps in individual pupils' learning and subsequently plan tasks that meet pupils' needs. However, in the planning for teaching of mathematics there is not enough scope for pupils to apply their mathematical skills or increase their ability to reason and explain their understanding.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the teaching of sophisticated, challenging and subject-specific vocabulary to extend pupils' language skills in all age groups and especially in the early years
- pupils make consistently strong progress in subjects other than English and mathematics and build upon the essential skills required to be, for example, historians or geographers
- the teaching of reasoning and problem-solving is fully embedded across the school so that pupils have more opportunities to explain their mathematical understanding of important concepts and skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing board, 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

Joseph Figg  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your head of school, middle leaders and three members of the local governing board, and I held a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer from the academy trust. I considered the 25 responses to Parent View, including the 25 free-text comments. I also considered the 33 responses to the pupils' survey and 19 responses to the staff survey. I spoke with pupils formally and informally during the day. We observed teaching and learning together. I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the single central record of pre-employment checks on staff, current performance information, your school self-evaluation and the most recent strategic plan.