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Mrs R Tainsh
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Tainsh

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

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 June 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 are a determined and motivated headteacher who strives to meet the needs of all pupils, their families and your staff. You lead and manage your school very well. You are supported admirably by your leadership team. Together, you have driven improvements across the school, and ensured that pupils make consistently good progress.

The school is a calm, happy and welcoming place. Throughout the school, vibrant displays celebrate examples of pupils' learning and the Christian ethos. This is at the heart of everything that you do in school. Your Christian values have created an inclusive and nurturing environment. This has a direct influence on pupils' well-being and their attitudes to learning. The school motto 'learning to love, loving to learn' contributes to the culture of caring and learning together. This is followed by everyone in the school community.

Staff morale is high, because staff feel supported and valued. They appreciate the range of opportunities that they receive to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. Those who responded to the online survey stated that they are proud to work at the school.

You set high expectations for the behaviour and conduct of both pupils and staff. Pupils behave well in class and around school. Conduct across the school during the inspection was of the highest standard. Pupils wear their uniforms with pride and present their work well. Pupils are very confident and curious. They have positive

attitudes to learning. The pupils with whom I spoke are proud of their school and value their education.

Most parents that responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, are supportive of the school and would recommend the school to others. One comment summed up many of the positive views of parents: 'St Mary's is an inclusive family which helps all of its learners (to) grow, both socially and educationally.'

You have an accurate and thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You ensure that all leaders and governors also understand. This information is then used to improve the quality of provision further. The areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture around keeping children safe throughout the school and in the wider community. All staff and governors understand their roles in keeping children safe. They receive a wide range of comprehensive training. As a result, staff are knowledgeable and know what to do if they have concerns about pupils' safety or well-being. Checks that leaders undertake on the suitability of adults to work with pupils meet requirements.

Pupils all feel safe, respected and cared for at school. Pupils that I spoke with demonstrated their knowledge of different kinds of bullying and how to stay safe online. Pupils were also in agreement that bullying was rare. If it did happen, they said that teachers would quickly sort things out. Consequently, pupils enjoy school, and their attendance is good.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I focused on several lines of enquiry. The first concerned boys' writing in the early years. Children enter the school with skills below those typical for their age, and with limited experiences. They make a strong start to their education because of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The learning environments, both inside and outside, are vibrant and well resourced. A wide range of learning activities engage children's imaginations and develop their independence skills.
- Teachers use accurate assessment and children's interests to plan activities that develop the children's skills across the curriculum. Alongside this, teachers have spent time refining their curriculum. They plan topics and purposeful writing opportunities that engage boys. For example, during their 'superhero' topic, boys had the opportunity to write to the queen and apologise because her jewels were stolen.
- Current school assessment information and the work in boys' books, shows that boys are making good progress in their writing. However, despite these improvements, teachers do not provide a range of opportunities for children to

consolidate their reading and writing skills in free-choice activities.

- The next area we looked at was the progress that pupils are making in their phonic skills in Year 1. This was because the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check declined in 2018. You have acted swiftly to improve the teaching of phonics. The English leaders are knowledgeable and have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development. They have ensured that all staff have attended recent phonic training to deepen their subject knowledge and confidence when teaching phonics. As a result, pupils are using their knowledge of letters and sounds with increasing effect in their reading and writing. However, the improvements made to the teaching of phonics are still relatively new and have not had the desired impact on pupils' outcomes. In addition, many of the books that pupils read in school and at home are not matched well to pupils' phonic abilities.
- I also looked at how leaders are improving outcomes in key stage 1 at the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics. You have made many changes to improve teaching and learning for the most able pupils. Teachers have had targeted training. They also work with colleagues from other schools in order to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers ensure that activities are matched well to pupils' abilities.
- Pupils are challenged to extend their vocabulary. They are confident to ask what certain words mean. As a result, they are using their increasing vocabulary to good effect in their writing. For example, pupils in key stage 1, were using words like, 'petrified' and 'slithered' during a writing lesson. Additionally, the teaching of higher-order reading skills, and high-quality texts across the curriculum are having a significant impact on the current progress of the most able. In mathematics, the most able pupils are rapidly developing their mathematical-reasoning and problem-solving skills. Current school assessment information and the work in pupils' books shows that the most able pupils are making strong progress.
- Finally, I focused on pupil premium funding and what leaders do to support disadvantaged pupils to catch up. This was because the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 has remained lower than that of other pupils nationally, especially in reading and mathematics. Leaders have carried out a thorough analysis of the needs of the disadvantaged pupils. You have placed a high priority on supporting pupils' social and emotional needs, by employing a family support worker. Until she recently left, she provided small nurture group support and counselling for pupils and their families.
- Pupils that spoke to me were keen to tell me that one of the best things about the school is the care and support that it provides for everyone, especially as pupils stated, 'those who need it most'. You have recruited a new family support worker to continue this work.
- Leaders ensure that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is carefully tracked. The pupils receive a range of support and interventions. A team of teaching assistants provide small-group sessions and individual support so that pupils' individual needs are met. Many of these improvements are new, and are not embedded.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- phonics teaching is consistently effective, so that the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 is at least in line with the national average
- early reading books are closely matched to the stage of phonics that pupils are learning in lessons
- teachers consistently plan free-choice activities that consolidate children's early literacy and number skills in the early years
- they continue the improvements made to support pupils who are disadvantaged, so that greater proportions reach the expected standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Barlow

Her Majesty's Inspector

During the inspection, I observed teaching and learning and scrutinised examples of pupils' work. I met with you, senior and middle leaders and the business manager. I spoke with pupils in key stage 2, and also with pupils informally in lessons and around the school. I spoke with two governors and a representative from the local authority.

I took account of the 50 free-text responses from parents. I also took account of the 23 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the 67 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's self-evaluation; the school's development plans and assessment records; minutes of the governing body meetings; safeguarding documentation and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. I considered information posted on the school's website.