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Ms Caroline Welch
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Welch

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 11 December 2018, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last 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 be a section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection you have continued to improve the school and the quality of education it offers to pupils. Staff are grateful for the training, support and trust you place with them. Morale in the school is high. Parents, too, are delighted to send their children to such a warm and caring school. One parent summarised the thoughts of many noting, 'the staff are hardworking, dedicated and genuinely care for all of the children.'

In lessons, pupils listen carefully to their teachers' precise and knowledgeable instruction. An atmosphere of purposeful calm permeates the school. When the time comes, pupils set to task with purpose and industry, carefully following their teachers' guidance and overcoming any barriers they may face with perseverance and grit. As a result, pupils are highly productive and make very strong progress in a wide range of subjects.

The curriculum is broad and interesting. Pupils learn a wide range of subjects and love the variety of activities they undertake. For example, in music, pupils worked in groups to produce short compositions using guitars, keyboards, glockenspiels and cajons to perform and refine their work. In physical education, pupils enjoy the opportunity to learn new sports and demonstrate their learning to their parents at the end of every half term.

The first-class curriculum contributes greatly to pupils' personal development. They display excellent behaviour and attitudes to school, learning and each other. Pupils are tolerant and respectful towards others and feel safe in school. Their levels of attendance are exceptionally high compared to the national average.

At the time of the last inspection you were asked to refine systems for evaluating and improving the quality of teaching. In response you have recruited and developed a highly skilled and ambitious team of year and subject leaders. These colleagues are well trained and determined for their teams to be the best they can be. They evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility very well and use this information to put in place well-judged and highly effective plans for improvement. For example, in art, leaders identified that pupils did not have a secure understanding of the significant artists from history. They refined and revitalised the curriculum to ensure that pupils now have a clear understanding of the artists they so skilfully imitate.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding processes are well maintained and fit for purpose. All statutory checks are made on staff, volunteers and governors well before they set foot in the school. All staff receive first-class training which helps them to identify and report concerns about pupils and families. When concerns are received, leaders consider these carefully and respond without hesitation when families need help. Governors check this work as well as the recruitment of new staff and the induction procedures to satisfy themselves that children are safe.

Parents receive useful information to help them safeguard their children. For example, the regular newsletters help parents to keep up-to-date with the latest technology and their associated apps. The vast majority of parents assert that their children feel safe and that staff are easily contacted if parents need support or guidance.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils in Year 4 wrote excellent instruction texts, informing their younger peers how to cross roads safely. Every year, pupils learn about online safety well before they cover other topics in computing lessons. Pupils are well-prepared to make responsible decisions and manage risks well.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to look at: the arrangements for safeguarding; the progress of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in writing; the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics; and the accuracy of leaders' self-evaluation and the effectiveness of plans for improvement.
- Pupils' writing is a strength of the school. Highly skilled teaching and support staff instruct pupils how to use and apply the key components of grammar, spelling and punctuation in their writing. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, use this to excellent effect, constructing interesting and elegant texts to persuade, entertain or inform their reader.
- Writing across the curriculum is top notch. For example, pupils in Year 6 considered the nativity story from different perspectives and wrote excellent pieces to describe their similarities and differences. Pupils in Year 3 wrote detailed accounts, explaining to the reader why magnets attract or repel. This ensures that writing standards remain high and, importantly, pupils' thinking and understanding are promoted and recorded exceptionally well in a range of subjects.
- The mathematics curriculum is tailored to pupils' needs, requiring them to master the key skills such as written and mental calculation so that they can use these to solve challenging problems. Pupils throughout the school shared their pride in achieving the 'master' of times tables award and relish the opportunity to show off their talents. When they present themselves, pupils' reasoning is excellent and helps them to explain how they solve their problems as well as to overcome challenges. Pupils throughout the school make excellent progress in mathematics.
- Leaders at all levels are ambitious and well informed. They possess a deep and detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, using this to continually improve the school for the pupils and families they serve. Governors are appropriately curious and test leaders' assertions through their regular visits to the school. Leaders and governors have benefited greatly from the professional challenge and unbiased feedback provided by the local authority. Most systems in the school are extremely well established and effective. However, systems to review and evaluate the effectiveness of pupil premium funding are still developing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems for deploying and evaluating pupil premium funding are refined so that governors and leaders hold a sharper understanding of the school's effectiveness in this area.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Lambert
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, senior and middle leaders, and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I observed learning in 14 classes, all jointly with leaders. Together, we looked at pupils' work, including pupils' books. 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 evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I considered the 154 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 152 free-text comments, and spoke to parents at the beginning of the day and on the phone. I held two phone calls with officers from the local authority. I met with nine pupils from Years 3 to 6 and gathered the views of other pupils throughout the day.