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Mrs Victoria Morrall
Headteacher
Ursula Taylor Church of England School
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Dear Mrs Morrall

Short inspection of Ursula Taylor Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 9 February 2016, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. I appreciated the warm welcome I received when I arrived. I was impressed by the lovely environment for learning that staff create with attractive, high-quality and striking displays of pupils' work in classrooms and corridors. A sense of order, tidiness, attention to detail and celebration of pupils' achievements is immediately apparent.

Staff and pupils thrive under your strong, incisive leadership and your fairness and approachability. You inspire and motivate them to respond to your high expectations and to take pride in their work. They completely share your ambition to excel and be the best teachers and learners that they can be. Through splendid teamwork and positive relationships, leaders and governors have created a culture and ethos within the school community where everyone, including parents, feels valued, respected and included. Parents are exceedingly complimentary about the 'amazing' staff who are such 'dedicated professionals'. They appreciate the school's 'innovative and creative' teaching and recognise how well it actively promotes their children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. When asked, a pupil told me that what he liked most about the school was 'our values'. At Ursula Taylor, pupils are effusive about their learning and the wide range of activities and events they take part in that make school so enjoyable. They are happy, confident learners who achieve well both academically and socially.

I have identified many strengths that have been maintained since the school's previous inspection. However, you and governors have pressed on determinedly with making the improvements that inspectors recommended to make the school even better.

- Pupils' attainment in writing was identified as a key area for improvement; it is now a significant strength in Key Stages 1 and 2. Standards in writing are currently above average at Key Stage 1 and exceed expected standards for writing by the end of Year 4.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 3 in reading and writing in the Key Stage 1 assessments in 2015 was above national figures.
- Leaders and governors have taken the right steps to inject more rigour into health and safety procedures; staff, governors, parents and, importantly, the pupils themselves agree that they feel safe and are safe at school.

Even so, you rightly acknowledge that children's achievement should be higher at the end of the Reception Year and in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Plans are firmly in place to tackle this by making sure that pupils gain ground quickly in developing their early literacy and numeracy skills. You, and governors, also know that standards in mathematics are in line with national expectations but not as impressive as those in reading and writing. Mathematics features as a priority in the school's plans for future improvement. You have ensured that the new subject leader is receiving the right training to advise staff confidently and develop the subject knowledge and skills that will help them to check more frequently and accurately that pupils are grasping new concepts securely.

Pupils of all abilities make good progress because teachers gather information about their learning conscientiously. This helps them to see when individual pupils or groups are falling behind and need extra help to get them back on track. Since the introduction of the new National Curriculum, arrangements for assessment have had to change. Staff have been resilient in trying different ways to develop a reliable system. The current system is beginning to work but it is overly complicated, with too many layers of information that generate a heavy workload that is difficult to sustain over time.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is a top priority for all adults in the school. Training for staff and governors ensures that they keep up to date and are suitably qualified and confident to implement the school's policies. These include policies for safeguarding, behaviour, anti-bullying, e-safety and health and safety, and an anti-radicalisation statement. The school takes all of the necessary steps to ensure that newly appointed staff, volunteers and anyone else who works with children regularly, are subject to all of the statutory checks to ensure their suitability. Recruitment procedures are secure and reflect the Department for Education's guidance. Systems to refer pupils to other agencies in the event of any concerns about a pupil's welfare or well-being are efficient and effective. The school is pleased with improvements made by the local authority to speed up the early

health assessment process. Record-keeping is thorough and comprehensive. Procedures to reduce possible risks, such as careful planning for off-site educational visits, work well. In addition, from Reception onwards, pupils are taught to take responsibility for their personal safety and look out for potential dangers. Pupils have a secure understanding of e-safety and 'what could happen if...' when using computers, iPads and other technologies such as mobile phones.

Inspection findings

- School leaders communicate a strong commitment and ambition for pupils to achieve highly and to develop as well-rounded, confident learners who are ready for the next stage of their education by the time they leave the school.
- Leaders and governors are ambitious for the school to become an outstanding provider. They know what improvements are needed to achieve excellent provision and outcomes and support this with effective forward planning.
- Your high visibility in and around the school ensures that you have your finger on the pulse of what is happening in the classrooms on a daily basis. This adds to the information you gather about the quality of teaching and learning through other means, such as formal visits to see lessons and scrutiny of pupils' written work. All other leaders contribute to the 'big picture' of what is working well and what could be even better.
- Good and better teaching is supported by the school's rich and vibrant curriculum. This captures pupils' interest and provides them with essential skills, knowledge and understanding while offering plenty of variety and breadth.
- The school is on the brink of moving away entirely from its old assessment system using National Curriculum levels to a new system devised by the school. Attempting to use both in tandem has been cumbersome, difficult to manage and confusing. Further work is required to streamline the system to improve its effectiveness.
- The school fulfils its duty admirably to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through its strong emphasis on teaching religious, human and fundamental British values. Pupils are tolerant and show regard and respect for each other and adults. They develop positive relationships, know right from wrong and behave extremely well.
- Attendance levels are high and the school is supportive in helping the very few pupils whose attendance is irregular to come to school regularly.
- The school nurtures its close partnership with parents extremely well. Parents are supportive and appreciative of all that the school provides. Of the 57 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire during the inspection, all of them agreed that their children are happy, safe and well looked after; that they are taught well and make good progress; and that they would recommend the school to another parent. This was confirmed by parents who spoke to the HMI in person.
- Pupils' attainment in reading and writing is above average. Most also achieve well in physical education, computing, religious education and art, craft and design.

- In mathematics, attainment has been stuck within the broadly average range for some years. Leaders are determined to raise standards in mathematics by developing teachers' expertise and subject knowledge. This has already begun with new leadership in the subject and mathematics featuring as a priority in the school's future plans for improvement.
- From starting points that are lower than expected for their age, children in Reception make good progress, but too few reach the good level of development needed to prepare them for the work in Year 1. While the early years leader has been pivotal in improving provision and outcomes in the Reception classes, there is still work to do to promote and develop children's early literacy and numeracy skills. These are the weaker areas of their learning. In particular, the progress made by disadvantaged children is not as rapid as that of others.
- The special needs coordinator is an effective leader who ensures that pupils with disability and those with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum and make good progress. The school's commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity is reflected in its provision and support for this group of pupils.
- Similarly, disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 1 make good progress to reach at least national averages in reading and writing. Gaps between their attainment and other pupils in school and nationally narrowed markedly from 2014 to 2015. Few of these pupils exceed expected standards. Additional funding known as pupil premium has been used effectively to enhance provision for these pupils and raise their achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in mathematics, most pupils exceed the expected standard for their age
- children's attainment at the end of Reception (especially disadvantaged children) and that of pupils in the Year 1 phonics screening continues to improve
- systems for gathering information about pupils' learning are streamlined for clarity, efficiency and sustainability.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of St Albans, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Bedford Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) gathered a wide range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included: short observations of lessons, jointly with you, in most classes; sampling of pupils' current written work, especially in Year 4; and discussions with leaders.
- The HMI talked to a wide range of pupils informally in classrooms. The school selected a group of six pupils from Key Stage 2 to give a guided tour of the school at lunchtime and talk about what it is like in school on a typical day.
- The HMI held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, the leaders of early years, science and mathematics and six governors.
- The HMI looked at a range of documentation including information about the school's self-evaluation and plans for future improvement.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, arrangements for e-safety (keeping children safe online when using electronic media), documentation on referrals made to external agencies and risk assessments undertaken for educational visits.
- The view of 57 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account. The HMI also met with two parents.