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Mr C Haley  
Principal  
St Mary's CofE Primary Academy  
Trinity Avenue  
Mildenhall  
Bury St Edmunds  
IP28 7LR

Dear Mr Haley

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's CofE Primary Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 22 April 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, a group of pupils including the head boy and head girl, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the trust to discuss the actions being taken to improve the school. I scrutinised a range of documents and visited every classroom. I also looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their work during the classroom visits.

## **Context**

There is now a real feeling of stability within the school following many recruitment issues. Although there are still some temporary appointments due to maternity leave cover, you have ensured that these have had minimal negative impact on pupils' outcomes. There is interim leadership of key stage 1 at present. This has stretched the capacity of the able leader who has taken on the role. You and senior leaders agree that the attention has been more on key stage 2 and that key stage 1 has now had renewed attention. You are confident that there will be little turbulence during the coming two terms and, although you cannot be sure, you and governors have done much to ascertain teacher well-being and acted upon the information provided in the results of a survey. As a result, morale is good and staff have been working hard to do what is required of them to improve teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes. You are supporting the less experienced teachers well and, as a result, they are all progressing well and are all likely to successfully complete their first year in teaching.

## **Main findings**

You and your capable leadership team have done much to continue to improve the school following my visit in February and the subsequent sharing of your revised improvement plan with me. It is much clearer to see how you have prioritised specific areas for focused improvement. Your self-evaluation is much more reflective and based on secure evidence of good teaching, learning and assessment. As a consequence of this and continuing professional development, current school assessment information shows that pupils' outcomes in 2016 are likely to exceed the national average at the end of early years, key stage 1, key stage 2 and in the phonics check in Year 1.

Together we visited all classes, albeit briefly. It is evident that pupils are engaged in purposeful learning and that their aspirations have undoubtedly improved since February. Pupils were keen to show their work and to discuss what they were learning. The level of challenge was impressive, with pupils saying that 'it is good to challenge yourself'. This was particularly evident in key stage 2, where we heard pupils challenge each other, work collaboratively to solve complex ratio problems, and be genuinely pleased with themselves for doing so. Adults intervened and supported well in almost all classes and, as a consequence, the pace of learning was swift. There is however still some work to be done in key stage 1, which is less secure and where teaching is more variable. Leaders are tracking the progress of pupils over time in Years 1 and 2 and evidence seen suggests that there is less variability in pupils' outcomes than was seen during my visit. You and governors are keeping a close eye on individual pupils and targeted support is proving effective in minimising the impact of some class teaching.

Senior leaders refocused their improvement plans following my February visit and immediately set about tightening up how assessment information is used by both teachers and leaders. The priority of reading and how this influences pupils' writing has been tackled relentlessly and with dogged determination. As a consequence, teachers are using key class texts to improve pupils' comprehension skills. Pupils told me that the timetabled visits to the library are very popular. 'They give us the chance to see what books other people choose and find out why they chose them,' said one pupil. Another simply recognised that 'it means those children who don't have many books at home can take them home to read'. Pupils' outcomes in reading are now improving throughout the school and are more in line with those for mathematics. Writing continues to improve. Pupils are using their reading and phonics skills in their writing from the youngest to the oldest pupils.

I met with your very capable leadership team. It was refreshing to hear how their monitoring and evaluation skills continue to develop. Each member has a good grasp of not only their own area of responsibility but also that of their colleagues' areas. It was impressive to see this 'in action' during our meeting. It is a credit to both you and your leaders to see such collective and supportive leadership. The result is a school now in a much stronger position than at the July 2015 inspection in the vast majority of areas. One aspect that we agreed could be further improved is the analysis of the provision and outcomes for vulnerable pupils, particularly those who are looked after. Whilst it was clear that leaders know these individual pupils well, which is vital, the overview of how well pupils who are looked after are provided for is less clear.

Leaders and governors have already had many discussions about how to continue to support less experienced colleagues. The links you have made with an outstanding school which all of these colleagues will visit is a very good example of this support. As these colleagues move into their next year and take on subject leadership responsibilities, such excellent links will continue to ensure that these colleagues feel well supported. The thought that has already gone into how teachers will be deployed in September is indicative of an approach that is innovative and sensitive to individuals' needs.

The school's safeguarding procedures continue to meet requirements. Thank you for clarifying the information you provided in my previous visit regarding the attendance of vulnerable pupils. The improvement in their regular attendance is evident in information seen on my visit. Leaders know these pupils well and very good liaison and support are being given to them and their families.

## **External support**

Good support from the academy trust, local authority, the diocese and the Cambridge and Suffolk Schools Alliance, continues. As a very reflective leader, you are always looking at ways to improve the school, support colleagues and ensure that pupils are given every opportunity to thrive in this school and indeed in the next phase of their education, for example, your work to establish links with the outstanding primary school and the local secondary school, the latter of which you are pursuing relentlessly. You and your governors are astute at selecting appropriate and effective support and challenge. As a consequence, the school's improvement journey continues apace.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections, and it is likely that I will provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of the trust, the diocese and the director of children's services for Suffolk local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock

**Her Majesty's Inspector**