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Mr David Bome
Headteacher
Copford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mr Bome

Short inspection of Copford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 November 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 the school was judged to be good in January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and has made several improvements to teaching, learning and outcomes as they strive towards providing an outstanding education for pupils.

It is evident that nearly all pupils thoroughly enjoy attending the school. All pupils work hard during lessons and demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. They are particularly proficient at working in groups and willingly share their ideas with one another. They try hard to gain the 'keys to success' that you, other leaders and teachers have established to develop social skills, and are proud to receive the certificates that celebrate their achievements.

You have established a culture of care and consideration that is underpinned by a very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural education that the pupils benefit from. One area identified for improvement at the last inspection was to develop the pupils' understanding of different faiths. You and the teachers have made these improvements. The pupils' well-developed understanding of the Christian faith means that they use this to gain an understanding of other faiths, for example by comparing spaces for prayer or holy sites. The pupils spoken to demonstrate an age-appropriate understanding of a range of different faiths because of the visits and activities within the curriculum that have been arranged.

You and the assistant headteachers are very good at identifying where improvement is required and then taking action to address the relative weakness. An example of this is the marked improvement in the quality of writing, particularly that of boys. In all classes, there is now a consistent approach to the teaching of writing. Unvalidated assessment information in 2016 shows that throughout their time in key stage 2, boys made slower progress than girls. However, their progress rapidly improved last year, resulting in the difference between boys in school and those nationally reducing. The improvements also benefited the girls. Good progress ensured that a larger proportion of girls reached the expected level when compared to girls nationally.

You and the other leaders have been effective in ensuring that teachers are equipped to implement the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. There are many exciting aspects to the curriculum, such as the Forest Schools initiative, where links are made to subjects like history. Pupils carry out practical activities, for example, shelter building to better understand how people lived in the past. Assessment procedures accurately track the progress of pupils so that alternative support can be arranged when it is identified that individuals need more help to keep up with the others.

At the time of the last inspection the quality of the provision in the early years was identified as an area for improvement. This has been tackled very successfully by your leaders, particularly the early years leader. The outside area has been transformed into a vibrant learning environment. Children play constructively and their progress is carefully checked by well-trained teaching assistants. The new assessment and recording system gives parents the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to their child's development. Over the last two years the proportion of children gaining a good level of development has increased and is just above average. This represents good progress from their starting points.

One of your current priorities is to strengthen the leadership skills of middle leaders who have responsibility for subjects such as history, geography and science. This is a worthwhile priority. Currently, insufficient attention is paid to developing subject-specific skills, such as investigation in science and map-reading in geography. In addition, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged in these subjects as expectations are not high enough and generally they are given the same tasks to complete as the others. However, literacy skills are applied effectively across these subjects and the content is often interesting and engaging.

In mathematics, in some classes, the most able are not stretched sufficiently because they do not have enough opportunity to apply their skills in reasoning or problem solving activities. However, in Year 6 for example, pupils are challenged effectively, making rapid progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of safety and security has been established across the school. For example, pupils are very familiar with the displays that explain how to keep safe

when using the internet. During the inspection, pupils were learning how to ride a bike safely. Initiatives such as Forest Schools help pupils to develop an understanding of how to stay safe and use their initiative in unfamiliar environments.

There are few reported instances of bullying and nearly all pupils and parents report that they feel safe in school. You have provided opportunities for pupils to understand bullying and racism, which is equipping them well for the future.

You and the other leaders demonstrate a tenacity when ensuring that vulnerable pupils, or those at risk, are helped swiftly. Records show that appropriate action is taken to involve outside agencies in a timely fashion as soon as you are made aware of a concern.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. However, they could be organised so that those responsible can quickly oversee the effectiveness of safeguarding. For example, the records of staff training are kept by senior leaders in one place, whereas the safer recruitment records are managed in a different place. It would be easier to command an oversight of the security of safeguarding procedures if they were all kept centrally.

Inspection findings

- The leadership of teaching and learning is very effective. You and the assistant headteachers have successfully ensured that pupils in all classes benefit from good-quality teaching and learning across a range of subjects. Areas identified to improve teaching at the last inspection are no longer relevant.
- Governors demonstrate that they are knowledgeable and perceptive. A healthy culture of transparent accountability has been established between the governors and the leadership team. This has ensured that the decisions made by you and the other senior leaders are challenged when appropriate to ensure that the best course of action is taken as you continue your journey towards providing an outstanding education for pupils.
- The links with the local consortium of schools have been very productive. This consortium has enabled the sharing of good practice, staff training and the moderation of assessment results.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive high-quality teaching and care because of the excellent and expert direction given by the special educational needs coordinator. Extra support for these pupils ensures that they make good or better progress.
- Unvalidated assessment information shows that at the end of Year 6 the progress of pupils in reading is significantly above average. Consequently, the proportion that reached or exceeded the expected level was higher than average. Progress in writing and mathematics, while good, was slower, and although the proportions reaching or exceeding the expected level was higher than average, the difference was smaller than that in reading.
- Younger pupils are well equipped to read because of good phonics teaching.

Even those who find reading more of a struggle use their phonics skills when reading words. The most able pupils are fluent readers who are developing a good understanding and love of literature.

- Assessment information shows that by the end of Year 2, the proportions of pupils that attain the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics are average. The proportion that have learned in greater depth is a bit higher than the average in these subjects.
- In subjects such as art, information and communication technology and religious education, pupils make good progress, producing work to be proud of.
- There have been no exclusions since the last inspection and the attendance rate is above average. The rate of persistent absence is low.
- You recognised the need to implement a handwriting scheme for younger pupils in key stage 1. This has had a definite impact on improving the quality of handwriting by the end of Year 2. Unfortunately, pupils in key stage 2 have not benefited from this and the poorer quality of the handwriting of some undermines the good quality of the content of the writing and the proficiency of their spelling, punctuation and grammar. You have recognised this and are rightly providing extra support to remedy this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have more opportunity to develop the subject-specific skills and concepts in history, geography and science
- the most able pupils are given more challenging problems and activities to develop their reasoning skills further in mathematics, and expectations of what they can achieve in history, geography and science are raised
- some safeguarding procedures are centralised and managed more efficiently to enable leaders to oversee them easily.

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

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant headteachers, six governors, administration staff, pupils and the early years leader. Short visits were made to all classrooms where books were scrutinised. A range of documents, policies and assessment information was examined. Questionnaire responses from pupils, staff and parents were also examined.

The following lines of enquiry were pursued during the inspection:

- the achievement of the most able pupils
- how leaders ensure that the boys achieve as well as the girls, particularly when writing
- the improvement in the provision in the early years since the last inspection
- the quality of teaching and learning in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics
- the action that leaders are taking to accelerate pupils' progress in key stage 2, particularly in mathematics and writing.