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Rosemary Washford Mower
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Washford Mower

Short inspection of Nash Mills Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In all the discussions that I had with you, staff and governors, it was apparent that you all share high expectations and a strong desire for every pupil to achieve well academically and in their personal development. The school's strong commitment to equality of opportunity and inclusion for all shines through all aspects of its work. The strong values underpinning the school's ethos are promoted effectively through the curriculum, which is broad, balanced and enriched with a range of educational visits, events and festivals. Many parents described the school's tangible 'family feel'. At Nash Mills, pupils enjoy learning, which is reflected in their consistently good attendance. You ensure that, on a weekly basis, staff are made aware of individual pupils who, due to exceptional personal circumstances, may be feeling particularly fragile, so that staff are in a position to support them sensitively. Many parents talked about the way in which the school responds so well when their children encounter difficulties socially or in their learning.

The level of satisfaction among parents is generally high and, in their written responses, they were particularly complimentary about your effective leadership. For example, they said that staff and children 'have the utmost respect' for you, that you are 'a very positive influence in the school' and that you have created a school 'where children feel very valued and they thrive'. Staff also rate your leadership highly and they are proud to work at the school. You and the governing

body have managed changes in staffing extremely well this year to reduce any adverse impact on pupils' learning. Your strong leadership, coupled with effective governance, ensures that the school is well placed to sustain the good quality of education provided for its pupils.

You have addressed the area for improvement following the previous inspection well. At that time, inspectors found that pupils were not given enough time to work actively and on their own in class. We visited all classes together and looked at a sample of pupils' written work in each class, which substantiated what you and other leaders told me about the good progress that current pupils are making. We saw pupils actively involved in their learning through many practical activities requiring them to work things out for themselves. For example, pupils were using practical resources and apparatus to solve problems in mathematics before writing down their findings. Pupils are making good progress in mathematics generally. However, the work we looked at in their books showed that problem-solving activities are mainly through word problems with little variety to extend their skills in thinking through more complicated problems and working out how to solve them. The work in pupils' English books showed that they are making good progress from their starting points. However, teachers' expectations for pupils to write at length across the full range of subjects are not consistently high.

Since the previous inspection, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has remained close to, but below, average. In the early years classes, we saw children learning enthusiastically through play and the range of activities was impressive. However, some of the activities, particularly those outdoors, were not challenging enough for the most able children. Also, we both noted that children did not clear toys and equipment away when they had finished playing with them. Parents are strongly encouraged to contribute to their children's learning and they come into school to look at their work and the teachers' evidence about their learning. However, one or two parents with children in the early years classes commented that they would like to know more about what their children are learning during the week so that they could help them more at home.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You place safeguarding as a high priority and staff know that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. In response to new guidance, you have ensured that staff have received further training on the key changes since September 2016. Staff are in a strong position to recognise signs that pupils may be at risk. All staff, governors, volunteers and visiting professionals are correctly vetted to ensure their suitability to work with children. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding contributes to your diligent monitoring of safeguarding to ensure that systems and procedures are followed consistently. You also follow advice and take action following the local authority's annual audit of safeguarding.

As the designated lead professional for safeguarding, you ensure that you retain an

overview of the actions taken when concerns are raised. This ensures that issues are dealt with promptly. You do not hesitate to seek advice from children's services, health and educational professionals or the local authority's designated officer for child protection to help you in taking the right action if needed. In particular, you have ensured that pupils are taught effectively how to keep themselves safe online. You are diligent in keeping parents up to date with the most recent research and information about e-safety and cyber bullying, so that they are suitably informed to take steps at home to minimise risk and keep their children safe.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about pupils' achievement in English and mathematics, as results over time have been inconsistent. Between 2013 and 2015, pupils' attainment in key stages 1 and 2 was at least in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2014, key stage 2 pupils made rapid progress and attainment rose to above average in all subjects. In the new 2016 tests, most Year 6 pupils reached the expected standard in reading and mathematics but writing stood out as a weakness.
- Written work in pupils' English books showed that they are making good progress this year in writing. They are learning to use more complex vocabulary, grammar and punctuation. Pupils apply their knowledge of phonics well to attempt to write sophisticated words. In key stage 2, pupils are expected to check their spelling routinely using a dictionary.
- Leaders consider very carefully what the barriers are to learning for every pupil and they do something about it. They have taken steps to boost pupils' learning in areas that they found to be weak in the 2016 tests. They have introduced lunchtime clubs and catch-up sessions after school for particular groups, such as the mathematics club for girls to increase their confidence.
- You and the governors allocate most of the pupil premium and special needs funding effectively to increase levels of adult support for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, you also consider the impact of pupils' well-being on their learning by arranging access to counselling, mentoring and play therapy for pupils who have emotional and mental health needs. All of these approaches are working well, enabling most pupils to make good progress, and some are making very strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In some classes, we found the good quality of pupils' written work in English does not extend to their written work in other subjects. This is because some teachers give them worksheets that are easy to fill in and do not encourage them to write at length to explain what they have learned. Even so, subject leaders provided convincing evidence that pupils are achieving well in a range of non-core subjects such as physical education and sports, history, geography and computing because these are taught well.
- You and the subject leaders ensure that pupils are learning all that they should and developing the knowledge, skills and understanding to reach expectations for

each year group in their subject. Subject leaders use a variety of approaches to check the quality of teaching and learning, such as observing in lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to pupils.

- I took into account a range of evidence about parents' views of the school during the inspection as it was one of the key lines of enquiry. You have made some changes to promote and strengthen partnerships with parents. In particular, you are regularly meeting with parents of disadvantaged pupils to discuss how they can help them at home. The early years team has organised workshops for parents about reading and writing and holds formal meetings to discuss children's progress. These planned meetings are useful but some parents would like more regular information and updates.
- Over time, not enough children have moved into Year 1 with a good level of development to prepare them well for work in Year 1. The acting deputy headteacher has been addressing this robustly by making improvements in the provision.
- We saw how engaged children were in activities covering the full range of learning required in the early years. Adults supported them well to encourage counting and number skills, extending their speaking and listening skills and their immersion in imaginative and make-believe play. There were lots of opportunities for them to practise and develop their early reading, writing and number skills. Even so, some of the activities outside were not challenging enough for children at different stages in their development, particularly the most able. We also observed that children were not taking responsibility for clearing up after themselves, which is important for their personal development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception rises to at least the national average by:
 - ensuring that activities outdoors are sufficiently challenging for children at all stages of development
 - finding ways to update parents more regularly on how well their children are learning at school so that they can support them at home
 - raising expectations for children to look after toys and resources and put them away when they have finished with them
- teachers' expectations for pupils to write at length across the full range of subjects are consistently high
- in mathematics, pupils are given a wider range of activities to improve their ability to think through how they will solve problems.

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 Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I held meetings with you, the acting deputy headteacher, the inclusion leader and subject leaders for English, mathematics, computing, physical education, history and geography. We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' learning.
- You and I observed teaching and learning in all classes. We looked at a sample of the work in each class for pupils of different abilities.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements, records, files and documentation were examined. Discussions were held with the designated safeguarding leads. I also looked at detailed case studies.
- I met with seven governors.
- The views of 71 parents who responded to Parent View, 23 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 108 pupils who completed the online pupil questionnaire were taken into account.
- I spoke to the school's local authority improvement adviser on the telephone.