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Mr Robert Morrissey
Executive Headteacher
St Alphege Church of England Junior School
Widney Manor Road
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Dear Mr Morrissey

Short inspection of St Alphege Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Following your appointment in April 2017, you rapidly established a clear and accurate view of the strengths of the school and have identified areas where it can improve further. You have formed positive relationships with teachers and other members of staff, and they share your commitment to ensuring that all pupils develop as well-rounded individuals, who succeed in all aspects of school life. All members of staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire were positive about your leadership.

Governors appreciate your candour and openness, and feel well informed about the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. They recognise that, while pupils generally reach high standards of attainment by the time they leave the school in Year 6, there is some inconsistency in the progress they make, particularly in writing. Governors support the decisive action that you have taken to reduce class sizes with effect from the start of the new school year. The very large majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were appreciative of the work of the school, and recognised that there is a need for change to allow the school to continue to develop and improve.

You, together with the deputy headteacher, are implementing a series of 'non negotiables' that set precise expectations for how pupils will be taught and for the

standards that are required in their work. These are aimed at ensuring that the quality of teaching continues to improve and that more pupils can make outstanding progress. Through your role as executive headteacher of the St. Alphege federation of schools, you have identified that it will be beneficial to provide teachers and other staff with more opportunities to work alongside their colleagues from the partner infant school. You have established curriculum teams, led by school leaders, that utilise the skills of teachers from both schools and increase opportunities to share expertise. Although the curriculum is broad and balanced, you have identified that there is a need to widen the range of experiences that teachers provide for pupils to further enhance their learning across all subjects. These plans are at an early stage and are not yet embedded. You recognise that it will be beneficial for the school to be outward facing in its approach to staff development and to learn from best practice, both within the federation and from other schools, both locally and nationally.

During the inspection, we reviewed the provision for disadvantaged pupils. We agreed that systems for monitoring the impact of the additional funding that the school receives for these pupils could be more sharply focused on their learning and progress.

You demonstrate a palpable commitment to ensuring that the school's Christian values of love, responsibility, forgiveness and respect are understood and adhered to by pupils and staff. Pupils value the support that their teachers give them. Pupils understand that their actions can affect others. As a result, behaviour around the school is consistently good. Pupils said that there is virtually no bullying, and they are confident that strong and appropriate action would be taken if it were to occur.

Pupils are encouraged to show maturity and there is a strong focus on developing their emotional, social and physical health and well-being. The additional sports funding is used effectively to provide additional specialist, high-quality physical education teaching. There is a very well planned and taught personal, social and health programme, including a revised and recently implemented sex and relationships programme. This helps pupils to develop their understanding of the different relationships that exist within society. An example of this was seen during the inspection, when older pupils maturely discussed the need for equal acceptance of heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Pupils' comments such as, 'We don't choose who we fall in love with; it just happens' illustrates the depth of understanding and empathy that pupils develop as they move through the school.

Leaders have addressed successfully the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Work is now better matched to the needs of the most able pupils, including in their reading work. Teachers ensure that they provide good opportunities for pupils to engage in purposeful discussions about their work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Systems for ensuring that staff appointed to the school do not pose a threat to pupils' safety and well-being are thorough and well managed. Suitable checks are carried out through the Disclosure and Barring Service on all staff, governors and volunteers. The safeguarding governor uses her professional expertise well to ensure that school leaders are held to account, for instance through carrying out regular checks on the single central register. She has instigated a safeguarding audit that is being used to identify whether there are ways that this aspect of the school's work can be further strengthened.

Staff and governors have received up-to-date training on their safeguarding responsibilities, including on how to ensure that pupils are kept safe from radicalisation or extremism. The headteacher and other leaders have provided pupils with accurate but reassuring information about the recent terrorist incidents in London and Manchester. This has helped pupils to recognise that the overwhelming majority of people in this country and across the world are respectful of the rights and beliefs of others.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have recognised that outcomes in writing have not, in recent years, been as strong as those in mathematics and reading, especially for middle-ability pupils. They have been successful in ensuring that pupils are taught key skills in spelling, grammar and punctuation, and this has resulted in pupils making good progress and attaining high standards in this aspect of writing by the time they leave the school. Leaders have increased opportunities for pupils to write extended pieces of work that require them to apply their core skills in their writing. Pupils value the high-quality texts that they study in lessons, and this provides them with examples of how they can develop their own writing skills in ways that will engage the reader's interest. Examples of this were seen during the inspection, particularly among the oldest pupils.
- However, there is inconsistency in teaching that means that not all pupils are provided with sufficient opportunities to write at length regularly, and across a range of subjects. Expectations from some teachers on the amount of writing that pupils produce and the quality of the work are not sufficiently high and, as a result, pupils' progress is still not as strong in writing as it is in mathematics and reading.
- Leaders have shown commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. Additional pupil premium funding is used effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have access to the same opportunities as other pupils in school. For example, leaders have used funding to allow disadvantaged pupils with a particular talent for music to receive specialist high-quality tuition.
- Funding is also used to provide interventions for groups of pupils to assist them in diminishing any differences in attainment when compared with other pupils nationally. As a result, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieve the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave

the school is above that of other pupils nationally.

- The strategy for determining the use of additional funding is not yet sufficiently refined to accurately identify the specific barriers to learning for all disadvantaged pupils. As a result, leaders recognise that they are not always able to ascertain the impact that the additional funding is having on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders place a high emphasis on ensuring that pupils develop key values, such as respect, tolerance and an understanding that people of different faiths have beliefs that are of great importance to them and of equal value. Pupils learn about different religions in assemblies and through religious education lessons. Pupils of different faiths proudly share their religious beliefs with their classmates and involve them in their important religious festivals. Leaders recognise that there are further actions that can be taken to deepen pupils' understanding of other faiths and beliefs. Leaders are developing the curriculum to provide a set of core entitlements that each pupil at St Alphege Junior School will receive. These are planned to include regular visits to a wider range of places of worship.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils are extremely well supported in their moral, social and cultural development. During the inspection, pupils in Year 4 were seen practising for a performance as a ukulele ensemble. They showed great enthusiasm and skills, and benefited from the specialist music tuition that the school purchases. This demonstrated the importance that leaders place on pupils' cultural development.
- Pupils make good progress across a broad range of subjects. The teaching of science is particularly strong. The school has a 'Phiz' laboratory that enables pupils to develop strong scientific skills and undertake investigative work in an extremely well-resourced and stimulating environment.
- Leaders are aware that there are some inconsistencies in the teaching of core subjects between classes. For example, some pupils who spoke to me during the inspection commented on the fact that they do not find modern foreign languages exciting and that there is a lack of continuity in this aspect of their learning. The review that the headteacher has instigated into the curriculum is focused on ensuring that all pupils are enthused by all the subject teaching that they receive.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to write independently and at length, both in English and across other subjects
- the curriculum is further developed to provide pupils with a broader range of learning opportunities across all subjects
- opportunities for teachers to share and observe good practice and to work more closely with the partner infant school are extended and embedded
- leaders develop a more precise system for measuring the impact of pupil premium funding on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I met with five governors, including the acting chair of the governing body. I considered the 47 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and looked at free text comments from parents. I visited, together with you and the deputy headteacher, eight classes to observe learning. I spoke with pupils in lessons and at lunchtime and met with a representative group of pupils. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime on the playground.

I scrutinised information about pupils' progress during the last academic year. I considered other documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and the school improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, including policies and checks on staff employed in the school, and checked the school's website. I also analysed the range of views expressed by staff through Ofsted's questionnaire about the school and its leadership.