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Miss Amy Wareham
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Wareham

Short inspection of Matching Green Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2018, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

The effort and commitment of skilled leaders and governors have made sure that Matching Green Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School continues to provide its pupils with a good standard of education.

You were appointed after a turbulent time for the school, with three different headteachers having been in post following the previous inspection before you took up the role in 2016. During this time of instability, standards in the school declined. However, the local authority has guided and supported you and your governors wisely since your appointment. As a result, you and the governors have rapidly become more confident and effective in your roles. You share the same commitment to creating the very best educational experience for every pupil in your care and, along with your staff, you and the governors are all making strong progress towards achieving this aim. Standards and outcomes for pupils have improved. Children make a positive start in the high-quality early years provision and continue to make good progress as they move through the school.

Your school is a smaller-than-average primary school and this helps your staff to get to know each pupil individually. You, your staff and governors use this personal approach to ensure that pupils' social and emotional needs are effectively met

alongside their academic development. Many parents and carers mentioned this in their comments to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, saying how well the staff help their children both to learn and to grow as individuals. Typical comments included 'Matching Green School is a caring and nurturing community that values each pupil' and 'the school is more like a family and the staff genuinely care about the individual child.'

There is a happy, purposeful atmosphere in classes and around the school. Pupils are friendly and confident. They told me that they enjoy coming to school because 'everyone is kind here' and 'we learn a lot in our lessons.' Our joint observations in all classes confirmed that pupils behave well. In lessons, they willingly get on with their tasks and respond readily to the staff who work with them. Pupils are proud of their achievements. They talk positively about their work and their learning.

You, the leadership team and governors have taken effective action to attend to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. For example, one area for development was to provide more training opportunities for staff in order that they improve their practice further. Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes in staff and you have appointed new leaders. You have worked hard to build a successful and effective staff team. All 13 staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey agreed that the school is led and managed well. Staff enjoy working at the school and feel well supported because there are systems in place to share ideas and plan together. The school works in partnership with a group of local schools. This provides further opportunities to strengthen provision. Joint work between these partnership schools means that teachers and governors are able to discuss, observe and share the best practice. Consequently, the quality of teaching is securely good throughout the school and staff morale is high.

Your evaluation of the school identifies the strengths and points out accurately where improvements are needed. For example, pupils' achievement in phonics has not been as strong as nationally, and this is a current priority. You also know that the most able pupils do not always achieve as well as they should. The school's action plans point clearly to the targets that you are working towards and how you intend to achieve them.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, governors and staff work hard to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Rigorous checks are carried out on all adults who work or volunteer in the school.

Staff receive regular and helpful training to ensure that they know their safeguarding duties. You and the other leaders for safeguarding have effective systems to make sure that staff know what to look out for and that potentially vulnerable pupils are quickly identified. Where there are concerns, you take swift action to support these pupils, including making referrals to the local authority where appropriate. You are tenacious in making sure that referrals are followed up and action taken where needed. You keep detailed and well-organised records.

Pupils told me that they are well looked after in school. They feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, including when online. Pupils say that there is no bullying in the school and they can talk to the adults in the school if they have any concerns. Parents who completed the online questionnaire overwhelmingly stated that their children are happy and safe in school.

Inspection findings

- I identified, and shared with you, some lines of enquiry to check that the school remains good. We agreed these at the beginning of the inspection. Firstly, I considered how effectively phonics is taught and if pupils make good enough progress in this area from their starting points. The published data shows that the proportion of pupils that reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been below the national average for the last two years.
- You, your leaders and governors have rightly taken effective action to tackle the previous weaknesses in phonics teaching. As a result of focused training, teachers and teaching assistants now consistently deliver a well-planned and structured approach in lessons. Popular children's books are used as a starting point to develop topics of work across all subjects. This helps pupils to develop a love of reading as they access a wide range of good-quality books.
- Teachers ensure that children and pupils are engaged in their phonics lessons by making activities interesting and fun. For example, we observed a group of Year 1 pupils enthusiastically sorting words into different groups. They noticed with great excitement that the words had different spellings but sounded the same. In the Reception class, children were confidently reading words to each other as they played a series of phonics games. When I heard a group of key stage 1 pupils read their books, they demonstrated a high level of phonics knowledge and were keen to use and apply their skills to identify sounds when reading the different words.
- Pupils' progress is closely tracked and targeted support put in place for those pupils who show signs of having difficulty learning phonics. Likewise, staff ensure that the most able pupils work at a quick pace and achieve well. Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities to practise and develop these skills further. As a result, pupils' attainment in phonics has improved and the school's assessment information indicates that a higher proportion of pupils are already achieving the expected standard.
- Another line of enquiry was to check how leaders are ensuring that the quality of teaching in mathematics is high and that, from their starting points, pupils achieve well in mathematics. This is because the most recent results for 2017 show that pupils at the end of Year 6 did not attain as highly in mathematics as they did in reading and writing. The standards pupils reached in mathematics were below the national average. While the results were skewed by the small number of pupils who undertook the assessments, you identified that some pupils had gaps in their essential skills and were not able to apply their knowledge to solve mathematical problems confidently.
- Through training and support, you have ensured that staff have higher

expectations and there is now a more consistent teaching approach in mathematics across the school. During our joint observations of mathematics lessons, we saw effective, high-quality teaching with some strong features. Pupils were investigating numbers and number patterns confidently. We observed that teachers give pupils a range of problems of increasing difficulty and teach pupils strategies to help them to solve these.

- When we looked at pupils' work in their books, we saw a range of calculation activities. In some classes, pupils' books included examples of more challenging problem-solving tasks that successfully extended and deepened pupils' knowledge and understanding. However, we agreed that this level of challenge was not consistently seen in all books. The school's assessment information shows clearly that, because of the actions you and your leaders have taken to improve the teaching of mathematics, most pupils are now making better progress in this subject throughout the school.
- Finally, I looked at how well you and your leaders ensure that the needs of the most able pupils are being met, so that they make rapid progress and attain well. Outcomes in 2017 show that the proportion of pupils attaining higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 was mixed and sometimes below the national average. Again, these results were skewed by the low number of pupils taking the tests. However, you have correctly recognised that the most able pupils are not always challenged to reach their potential in mathematics and, consequently, expectations of what these pupils can achieve need to be raised.
- You have introduced a range of effective support to help the most able pupils achieve well. Through staff training, you are challenging teachers to plan opportunities to encourage pupils to think creatively and learn in a variety of ways. The most able pupils also attend regular workshops organised by the partnership of local schools. During these sessions, pupils are provided with open-ended tasks that motivate them to think for themselves and make their own choices. You acknowledge that this effective practice needs to be a frequent feature of pupils' lessons in your school.
- When I met with a group of most-able pupils, they spoke enthusiastically about how teachers challenge them in reading and writing and help them to think deeply in most of their lessons. Work in their writing books demonstrated that they are given tasks that are suitably demanding for them. However, these pupils also told me that sometimes their work in mathematics is 'too easy' and they have to ask their teachers 'to get harder work'. You acknowledge that there is scope to ensure that teachers always offer the right level of challenge in mathematics across all year groups and avoid providing repetitive work for the most able pupils to complete before moving them on to more demanding tasks.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently challenge the most able pupils in mathematics, so that they

achieve the higher standards of which they are capable.

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

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

You and I discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' progress and attainment.

Meetings were held with you and your governors, including the chair of governors. I also spoke to the school's local authority improvement adviser on the telephone.

I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint observations with you of teaching and learning in all classes.

We looked at a sample of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities. I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as one of the school's designated safeguarding leads.

The views of 36 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 36 responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the school's own recent parent survey, which included the views of 50 parents. The 13 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey were also considered to obtain staff views.