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Mrs Emma Snowdon  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Snowdon

### **Short inspection of Over St John's CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 June 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Parents and carers are full of praise for the school's strong Christian ethos, which is a distinctive element of the school's community. In my discussions with you and governors, the commitment to nurturing pupils and enabling all to reach their potential was similarly plain. You are dedicated to the school's continuing improvement and focus your work on this. Your regular checks on teaching, learning and behaviour astutely identify what is working well and what needs to improve. You prioritise improvements and plan the necessary actions to achieve these. This effective process underpins the school's drive to improve.

When the school was last inspected, leaders were asked to improve pupils' attainment in writing, especially by the end of key stage 1. Since then, a new national curriculum has been introduced and pupils are now expected to attain higher standards by the end of both key stages. Effective leadership, including of teaching, enabled Year 6 pupils to make good progress and reach these standards in the 2016 and 2017 national tests for reading and mathematics. In writing, while progress rates were average in both years, standards remained in the bottom 20% of schools nationally. Boys' achievement was particularly weak. Improvement was evident in the 2017 statutory writing assessments, including more boys attaining the expected standard. Nevertheless, boys continued to underachieve compared to girls and attained less well than boys nationally.

A similar picture of attainment over these two years is evident at the end of key stage 1. In writing, standards have been in the bottom 20% of schools nationally, while in mathematics pupils have attained the expected standards. Standards in reading have varied, being above average in 2016 and below in 2017. Year-to-year results can be affected by the relatively small number of pupils in year groups, often with varying prior attainment. To some extent, this was the case for Year 2 pupils in 2017. Over time, however, achievement in writing has been weaker than in reading and mathematics at both key stages. The steps you are taking to improve standards in writing are having a positive effect. Standards are set to rise this year, not least because pupils in Year 6 and Year 2 have higher prior attainment. You recognise that sustaining improved standards over time, especially for boys, remains a priority.

At the last inspection, leaders were also asked to develop the role of subject leaders in subjects other than English and mathematics. Subject leadership is now much stronger than it was. However, some aspects are still not as effective as they might be. Unavoidable changes to staffing have played a part in this. There are systems to assess pupils' achievement in some subjects, but in others, assessment is at an early stage of development. You and other leaders are working to ensure that there is a consistent and reliable system to assess pupils' achievements in all subjects.

You recognise the school's role in promoting fundamental British values and pupils' understanding of diversity. You have deployed a member of staff to lead on this. Recent work has included identifying opportunities to promote British values across the curriculum and a research project for a small number of Year 5 pupils. Around the school, displays about British values provide pupils with a constant reminder of their importance and the basic principles that underpin them. You have made good strides with this initiative, but recognise that it is still a work in progress. This is also the case in relation to developing pupils' understanding of diversity and equalities.

You, staff and governors set high standards for pupils' behaviour. I observed good behaviour in classrooms, the dining hall and playground. You explained that this was typical and staff agreed. Most of the parents I spoke to and those who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire consider that behaviour is good. A few expressed concerns about bullying and the school's response to this. You have records of parents' concerns, most of which are fairly recent, and the actions that you have taken in response. I consider that, to date, these are appropriate. In my discussions with pupils, some spoke about a recent deterioration in behaviour by some pupils. The pupils with whom I spoke have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying. They described the current situation in terms of bickering rather than bullying, but said that it was ongoing. Pupils are regularly taught about the different forms that bullying can take and what to do if they experience or see it. They said that teachers and lunchtime staff deal well with any misbehaviour that occurs.

Governors understand their responsibilities. They possess the necessary skills and expertise to support and challenge you and other leaders. Governors are committed to improving their effectiveness through self-review. This has resulted in recent

changes to the way that they operate, meeting more regularly as a whole governing board, to increase their understanding of the school's work. The links that have been established with subject leaders are further informing governors' insight. Governors have ensured that most of the required information is on the school's website. However, not all of the necessary information about the curriculum is provided.

We agreed that some aspects of the school's early years provision should be better.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and staff know pupils well. Training for all staff is regular and effective. This means that staff are well placed to spot potential signs of risk to pupils' safety and well-being. The staff I spoke to were clear about how to respond if they have concerns about a pupil's safety or if pupils share concerns with them. The records you keep about referrals to professional agencies, and the resulting communications and actions, are thorough. You and staff ensure that pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe, including when using technology.

### **Inspection findings**

- Achievement in writing, particularly for boys, was a line of enquiry for the inspection. Teachers' assessments and the sample of books I reviewed for pupils in both key stages indicate that most pupils' writing broadly reflects the standards expected for their age. Progress is evident. Writing shows good incorporation of grammar, punctuation and spelling and the development of imaginative vocabulary. Teachers have thought carefully about how to motivate boys to write. Examples include police investigation reports and writing information texts based on research. Last term, you asked teachers to find more opportunities for pupils to write across the curriculum. During our visits to classrooms, I saw evidence of writing in history, science, geography, art, religious education and mathematics. In the early years, however, the outdoor area lacks any resources or opportunities for children to write or read. Despite the examples of improvement, raising standards in writing remains a school priority.
- Pupils' achievement in reading by the end of key stage 1 was another focus for the inspection. Year 2 pupils' below-average standards in 2017 were not typical. Pupils who did not attain the expected standard, including in phonics, have been well supported to catch up in Year 3. A number of boys who read to me used phonics very effectively to read unknown words. Fluency and expression are developing successfully and pupils understand and respond appropriately to punctuation. Pupils explain their reading preferences and it is clear that these are taken into account in the choice of books available. There is a strong focus on developing pupils' love of reading, with thoughtfully chosen texts at the heart of each term's topics. You rightly remain focused on enabling more pupils, particularly boys, to attain the higher standards and greater depth in their reading.
- My final line of enquiry was about how well the curriculum enables pupils to

make strong progress in all the subjects that they study, and prepares them for life in modern Britain. Pupils' books and teachers' plans reflect that pupils receive a broad curriculum that captures their interest. Educational visits and visitors and a wide range of extra-curricular activities enrich pupils' learning. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about these and named various subjects as favourites. In some subjects, pupils' books provide useful information about their standards and progress. In other subjects, especially where work is more practical, such as art and physical education, lack of assessment information limits leaders' insight into how well pupils are achieving. The early years curriculum is planned around children's interests. Regular assessments are made of children's achievements in all areas of learning. During our observations, most children were sustaining interest in the activities that they had chosen. However, there was limited challenge built into these, including for literacy and numeracy.

- You and staff have devised rolling programmes of work to ensure that the national curriculum is covered and that pupils in mixed-aged classes do not cover the same content twice. Many parents are happy with this arrangement and consider that their children have good variety in their learning. Some parents dislike the mixed-age classes and think that their children are held back because work is repeated. The curriculum planning I reviewed did not suggest this. Nevertheless, the school's website does not provide parents with the required information about the curriculum. Not all class pages tell parents which of the rolling programmes their children are following. Some do not give parents any information about what pupils are learning this year or in the current topic.
- Pupils can name the fundamental British values and are familiar with the basic principles that underpin them. However, the depth to which older pupils understand these values differs little from the understanding of younger pupils. There is also confusion between the values of democracy and individual liberty. Pupils have a secure understanding and appreciation of religious and cultural diversity. These aspects of diversity are routinely taught across the curriculum. Other aspects, such as sexual orientation and disability, are not well developed. You require subject leaders to report on equality and diversity in their summary evaluations. However, none of the examples I reviewed included information about how these ideas are developed in different subjects, for example in relation to the study of significant people. In some current history work, the study of significant explorers is focused entirely on men. Overall, the curriculum does not yet exploit in enough depth opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of diversity and equalities to deepen their understanding of fundamental British values.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- achievement in writing improves, particularly for boys, so that by the end of both key stages, standards are at least in line with those attained by pupils nationally
- pupils gain a more comprehensive understanding of diversity and equalities and a deeper understanding of fundamental British values

- the school has assessment information to show how well pupils are achieving in all subjects
- Reception children have frequent opportunities to practise and consolidate their growing knowledge, skills and understanding, including in literacy and mathematics, both indoors and outside
- the school's website provides parents with all of the required information about the curriculum and clearly explains how it is organised.

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

Yours sincerely

Margot D'Arcy  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you to discuss the school's evaluation of its work and priorities for improvement. I met with three governors and had a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. I reviewed a range of school documents, including those relating to safeguarding and behaviour. I considered samples of pupils' work and assessment information. We observed learning and behaviour in a sample of lessons. I observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around the school and at lunchtime. I listened to some pupils read. I took account of views expressed by parents, pupils and staff.