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Mrs Mary-Jane Collington
Headteacher
St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School
Oakfield Road
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Somerset
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Dear Mrs Collington

Short inspection of St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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 September 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.**

You have led the school with determination and rigour in your tenure as headteacher. St Mary's is an inclusive school. Pupils enjoy school and attend well. A notable feature is the strong care and support the school provides. Pupils have good attitudes to learning. As a result, pupils show high levels of resilience and do not give up.

You are accurate in your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and the aspects that require further work. Pupils' progress and achievements in reading and mathematics dipped at the end of key stage 2 last year. Your detailed plans to address these aspects are making a noticeable difference.

There have been a number of changes to the school's leadership structure since the last inspection. You have increased the number of middle leaders. Leaders at all levels are united in their goals to improve pupils' progress and achievement further. You have strengthened leadership systems to increase rigour and accountability. For example, you have revamped and tightened the school's appraisal systems and checks on teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, pupils' progress is accelerating.

The number of pupils at the school has continued to grow since the last inspection. Governors opened a Nursery on site in November 2017, and the number of children there is also increasing quickly. Currently, governors are working with the local authority to recruit your replacement. The new chair of the governing body took up her permanent post a few days before the inspection. She is committed to raising the levels of challenge and accountability that governors provide. This is to ensure that governors' own evaluation of the school's and the Nursery's effectiveness is thorough.

At the last inspection you were asked to improve the work of subject leaders so that they have a strong impact on improving teaching and their expertise is shared across the school. This work is increasingly successful. You have trained up an impressive array of middle leaders who are working determinedly to bring about further improvements and increase pupils' progress and achievement across the school. For example, in recent months, the school's assessment leader has improved the way pupils' understanding is checked. This is having a positive impact on how teachers use their assessments to plan work that builds directly on what pupils know, can do and understand.

The rigour with which middle leaders are working in recent months is striking. However, you rightly identify that some of this improvement work is relatively new. More time is needed to ensure that leaders sustain their good work to strengthen the impact of teaching and the school's assessment practices.

You were also asked to enable pupils to make rapid and sustained progress by ensuring that pupils know what they are learning and what they need to do to be successful. This work continues. Improved teacher assessments have resulted in a sharpening of the individualised targets that pupils receive. This is helping to fill gaps in pupils' learning where they persist. You recognise that in the past teaching has been too inconsistent in a few classes and this has hindered pupils' progress. Current teaching is making amends for these relative weaknesses. As a result, the differences between girls' and boys' attainment are diminishing steadily.

The vast majority of parents are very positive about the education their children receive. Almost every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, reported they would recommend the school to another parent.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff training is up to date. The school's checks when recruiting new staff are in line with national requirements to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. The Nursery manager has ensured that all welfare checks are in place and statutory requirements met.

Staff spoken to on inspection apply their training confidently so that pupils' risk of harm is minimised. Staff talk confidently about how to refer concerns should they consider a child to be at risk of harm. However, minor aspects of the school's safeguarding record-keeping require strengthening.

Pupils say they feel safe. They talk with confidence about what to do if they have a concern. They say that adults act quickly and show high levels of support and care for them. Pupils understand the risks of the internet and using mobile phones.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry looked at the impact of the leadership systems in place to improve pupils' achievement in reading. This is because the proportion of pupils meeting the standards expected for their age at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 declined to be below the national average. Pupils' progress in reading was average in 2016 and declined to be well below average in 2017.
- Reading is a core focus of your improvement plan. Leaders' actions to improve pupils' understanding of what they read are paying off. Regular professional discussions about pupils' progress are ensuring that the teaching is increasingly meeting pupils' needs well. Leaders' actions to train staff are already having a positive impact. Increasingly, the school's approach to teaching reading is enabling a greater proportion of pupils to read with greater fluency and accuracy. However, some school initiatives to develop pupils' comprehension skills are very recent. Consequently, more time is needed to establish fully this aspect of the school's work.
- My next line of enquiry looked at pupils' progress in mathematics. Across the last two years, pupils' progress in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has been below the national average. Leaders' strategy to improve mathematics teaching is proving effective. Over the last 12 months, enhancements to the teaching of mathematics have led to better coverage of all aspects of the mathematics curriculum. As a result, pupils use and apply their mathematical skills to solve problems and reason increasingly well. Pupils' current progress in mathematics is generally good. However, you rightly recognise that raising pupils' achievement so that a greater proportion of pupils meet and exceed the standards expected for their age remains a key priority for the school.
- Another matter I looked at was the school's assessment systems and their impact to ensure that teachers provide work that meets pupils' needs. The new assessment leader is working determinedly on the right aspects for improvement. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are rising quickly. Consequently, teachers understand the progress that each year group needs to make in order for pupils to enter Year 6 with the skills and knowledge expected for their age. Whole-school systems are in place to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' writing. However, in a few classes, teaching is not yet enabling pupils to make consistently good progress. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and some previously middle-attaining pupils are not catching up quickly enough.
- Finally, I looked at the impact of the governing body in holding leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes over time. This is because, in the past, some groups of pupils have not made consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2. Governors receive a wealth of information from the headteacher. However, they do not ask precise enough questions to challenge leaders about the school's performance. For example, they

have not challenged the differences in attainment between boys and girls robustly enough. The new chair of the governing body recognises that governors have not challenged leaders sufficiently about pupils' progress. Plans are in place to remedy this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of reading in key stage 2 enables pupils to apply their comprehension skills well so that pupils have a firm understanding of what they read
- governors evaluate the impact of school improvement initiatives thoroughly so that their understanding of whole-school effectiveness is consistently robust and accurate, including in the Nursery
- a greater proportion of pupils meet and exceed the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly middle-attaining pupils, boys, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, other school leaders, and two governors. I held telephone conversations with two representatives from Somerset local authority. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I met with a small group of pupils. I also talked to pupils in lessons and listened to their views about the school.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation reports, development plans and school performance information. I also looked at monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment, your analysis of pupils' attendance, and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 37 responses to the Parent View online survey and the free-text messaging service. I gathered the views of staff through discussions during the inspection and the online survey.