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Mrs Kate Johnston-Grant  
Headteacher  
St Nicholas Elstree Church of England VA Primary School  
St Nicholas Close  
Elstree  
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Hertfordshire  
WD6 3EW

Dear Mrs Johnston-Grant

### **Short inspection of St Nicholas Elstree Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 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 your school was judged to be good in February 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

Your well-established leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You and your leaders continue to ensure that staff develop the skills they need to move the school forward. Staff say that they enjoy working at St Nicholas Elstree Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary school. The staff team works well together and demonstrates the necessary passion and commitment to improve the school further. Since the previous inspection in 2014, standards have remained at the national average and, as a result, by the end of Year 6 most pupils are well placed to move successfully to secondary school.

Parents are very supportive of the school and almost all of the 56 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to others. Parents stated that they are very happy with the quality of teaching provided and in particular with how their children's confidence has grown since they started at the school. One parent summed up the views of many by saying: 'I am happy with the effort the school puts in every day for children.'

Pupils say that they enjoy school and the range of subjects offered. They particularly enjoy English and mathematics but also subjects such as art, science and physical education. They talked enthusiastically about the range of visits that the school provides. These events support pupils to become even more interested in the topics that they are learning about. One pupil explained to me how visiting the

Science Museum to see rockets had made him 'really want to write about them'.

You and your leadership team have prioritised the areas of development identified in the previous inspection. This has meant reviewing the curriculum so that pupils can practise their writing skills across a wider variety of subjects. It is evident that this is having an impact on pupils' progress towards the national expected standards. Leaders have high expectations of pupils' handwriting and this is resulting in pupils beginning to join their letters effectively in key stage 1 as well as supporting more accurate spelling. You are rightly trialling an approach to improve pupils' use of more adventurous vocabulary in their writing. This is already improving the quality of writing further for some pupils.

The work that you have done to support pupils in developing resilience in learning is improving their attitudes to learning. Teachers talk about what pupils need to do to be successful in learning and pupils apply these skills in lessons. This was a strength identified at the previous inspection and remains so. Pupils listen to their teachers attentively and are fully engaged in their learning.

You work effectively in partnership with the local authority advisers, who support you in analysing pupils' performance information and improving teaching and learning. Similarly, you value the partnership with diocesan professionals, who have helped develop the school's approaches to religious education. This collaborative, outward approach to school improvement is supporting the school to raise its expectations further and improve pupils' progress.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors have developed a positive safeguarding culture in the school and all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are made to ensure that all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with pupils. Governors take their role in safeguarding very seriously and monitor the school's safeguarding procedures regularly. They have produced appropriate checklists to support you and your leaders in monitoring the work that the school does to keep pupils safe. As a result, there is consistent and rigorous practice in approaches to safeguarding across the school. The administration staff, in particular, are appreciative of this support in carrying out their roles and say it helps them to be clear about what is expected.

You ensure that staff are appropriately trained and kept up to date about the latest guidance to keep children safe from harm. As the designated safeguarding lead, you ensure that there is appropriate cover in the school to carry out this important role in your absence. As a result, there are three additional leads who also carry out the role effectively. Leaders provide update training for staff to ensure that they are clear about recording and reporting incidents. This has developed adults' confidence in making decisions about what and how to report any concerns that they have.

Your chosen approach to the reporting of incidents is also supporting the clear recording of concerns and the actions you take to follow these up. This is because

all leaders can access appropriate information quickly and easily.

Pupils say that they feel safe and that behaviour is good in the school. They like the rewards received for positive behaviour, but also clearly understand teachers' expectations and what happens if they do not meet them. This supports the continued good behaviour in the school. Pupils can identify what bullying is, including cyber bullying, and feel strongly that there are adults in school who they can talk to if they are worried about anything. All pupils who responded to Ofsted's online pupil survey stated that they would be happy to recommend their school to a friend.

Parents also agree that pupils are safe at St Nicholas Elstree Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. One parent commented for many by saying: 'I know my children are safe and happy to be at school when I leave them.'

### **Inspection findings**

- I identified specific lines of enquiry to check that the school remains good. The first key line of enquiry was to explore how the curriculum, including the teaching of phonics, was supporting the progress of pupils to achieve well in writing. This was because pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 in writing was significantly below national averages, and in the bottom 10% nationally, in 2017.
- Writing opportunities have increased since school leaders reviewed the curriculum. Pupils now have the basic skills and knowledge to apply to all subject areas, such as when writing newspaper reports about historical events. This is enabling them to practise and embed their writing skills and also helping them to acquire and understand important knowledge from other subjects.
- Pupils in all year groups are making more rapid progress in writing as a result of the work that the school is undertaking. This includes collaborative work with the local authority to ensure the judgements teachers make about pupils' achievement are accurate.
- Pupils are developing particularly well the technical aspects of spelling, handwriting and punctuation. This is supporting the improving progress that they are making in writing.
- The number of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 has fallen for three years. However, the school's current assessment information shows that pupils are now making better progress with their phonics skills. This is the result of a better match of teaching to pupils' needs and teachers' increased expectations of what pupils and children can achieve, particularly in the early years. However, you and your leaders acknowledge that there is still more work to do to ensure that pupils and children achieve as well as they can in developing their phonics skills.
- The second line of enquiry was to investigate how the curriculum in the early years is ensuring good progress for all children, particularly in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. This is because there has been a three-year decline in children's outcomes at the end of early years.

- The school's current assessment information shows that children are already achieving better than they did in 2017. This is because you have made adjustments to the teaching of early phonics so that children have better skills in identifying sounds and letters on transfer from Nursery to the Reception class. As a result, more children are reading and writing at levels appropriate for their age and are achieving the expected standards in mathematics.
- You acknowledge that there remains a need to raise expectations of what children can achieve and to use time and resources more urgently and effectively in the early years, for example by using daily opportunities for children to practise basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics through a variety of activities. This is so that all children achieve as well as they can and are well prepared for the expectations of Year 1.
- The final line of enquiry was around attendance and what you and your leaders are doing to promote good attendance. This is because attendance overall has been below national averages for the last three years. Some groups of pupils, including those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those disadvantaged pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding, have had particularly low attendance for some time.
- You and your leaders have prioritised this area for improvement, including by focusing on rewards as well as sanctions. The introduction of the 'attendance aardvark' has motivated pupils to achieve better attendance and they also receive funds for their class resources when they have good attendance. As a result, current attendance is better than it has been for five years. Persistent absence has halved and is now better than the most recent national figure. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by poor attendance.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they raise expectations of what children achieve in the early years so that progress is stronger and children are ready for Year 1
- teachers in the early years use all opportunities, including outdoor provision, to accelerate children's progress in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics
- recent improvements in the teaching of phonics are embedded so that increased numbers of pupils reach the national expected standard at the end of Year 1.

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

Debbie Rogan

## **Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, areas for further improvement and information about current pupils' attainment and progress. I visited all year groups and held meetings with you and your senior leaders and spoke to pupils informally. I met with eight governors and the local authority adviser for the school. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with attendance information and SEN documents provided by the inclusion leader. I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint learning walks with you and your leaders. I looked at a range of pupils' work from across the school, both in books and on display. This included work from a wide range of subjects and a wide range of pupil abilities. The views of 56 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as 17 responses which parents made using the free-text service. The 18 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey were also considered.