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Mr Andy Spens
Headteacher
St Helen's Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Spens

Short inspection of St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Your vision and drive to develop consistently high standards of teaching have been instrumental to the improvements seen in pupils' achievement since the previous inspection. Pupils make strong progress in reading and writing and are doing so increasingly in mathematics. The standards pupils are reaching in their understanding in science and the humanities are equally impressive. You and the teaching staff provide a rich curriculum that pupils, parents and carers value, planning 'WOW' events to excite pupils' interest. Pupils confidently use their English and mathematical skills to deepen and record their learning in a range of subjects.

Pupils say that teachers make learning fun. Teachers' very high expectations can be seen both in the level of challenge in lessons and in the quality of the well-presented work in pupils' books. Pupils increasingly understand their own strengths and areas to improve and demonstrate their commitment to be 'flying high' in line with the school's vision. A parent typically described the ethos by saying: 'You can see and feel the dynamic and positive atmosphere, beautifully behaved polite

children and a willingness of teachers and pupils to be the best that they can be.'

You and your skilled leadership team have a deep knowledge of the school's effectiveness. Together with experienced and able governors, you plan and review every step of school improvement to ensure that there is an impact on the progress of all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. You and other leaders value the rigorous challenge from governors to explain and remedy any gaps in pupils' achievement. Equally, you work collaboratively with other local leaders and appreciate their perspective when monitoring the impact of any changes you have made. Increasingly, your skills and those of your leaders are being of support to other schools in their efforts to make rapid improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and governors say that the school's approach to safeguarding 'runs like a golden thread throughout school life'. This is evident in the confidence staff show in the quality of their training and their understanding of the school's procedures and policies. Staff at all levels feel the trusting relationships they have built with pupils are a key factor in helping them to be vigilant to pupils' needs. Every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, said that their children were happy and safe in school. Pupils have confidence in their teachers and their friends. They say that there had been a small number of incidents of bullying but they were in the past. As one pupil typically commented, 'Pupils are now kind and respectful, courageous in doing the right thing.' Pupils value the teaching that helps them to stay safe. The governing body ensures that the school takes a robust approach to pupils staying safe online. When questioned, pupils talk confidently about how they put this teaching into practice.

A strong culture of safeguarding has been developed through the example set by you, your leaders and the governing body. You are uncompromising in taking prompt action if you feel a pupil or their family needs support from agencies beyond the school. You have ensured that all staff fulfil their responsibilities to record small changes which may mean that a pupil is at risk of harm. Governors with specific expertise guide and support the school's work on safeguarding through close monitoring of the policies and procedures. The checks carried out on all adults who work with pupils are robust, timely and accurately recorded.

Inspection findings

- Firstly, I reviewed the impact of your actions to increase the rate of progress pupils make in mathematics. At the end of key stage 2 in 2017, although the standards pupils reached in mathematics were above national levels, their overall progress was not as strong as that made in reading and writing. In response, you launched a 'Year of Maths' to engage pupils' interest and identify and establish good practice in teaching numerical fluency and mathematical reasoning. Through research and good-quality professional development, you have drawn up guidelines for teachers' planning and assessment strategies in mathematics. Teachers have devised clear sequences of learning which ensure that pupils' skills

are built securely over time. As a result, teaching is consistently strong, and learning moves forward at a brisk pace.

- Pupils are now explicitly taught effective strategies for tackling problems. Pupils in key stage 1 take care to set out their work systematically so that they can not only find answers to problems, but also go back and check their working. Teachers set consistently high levels of challenge in mathematics lessons, which keep pupils engaged deeply with their learning. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, pupils created accurate and detailed line graphs based on their group's pulse rates at different points on their 'daily mile'. Sharp questioning by the teacher helped pupils to review the accuracy of their work and to make corrections. Teaching assistants are effective in prompting and guiding pupils, thereby encouraging pupils' resilience. A pupil expressed this, saying, 'Teachers don't give you the answer. They help you work through step by step.'
- Current standards of pupils' work and recent assessments show that the proportion of pupils showing a deeper understanding of mathematics is increasing across the school. However, you agree that there is more work to do to help pupils to explain their reasoning succinctly, using accurate mathematical language. You recognise that disadvantaged pupils would benefit from further emphasis on this aspect of learning.
- Next, I reviewed the progress boys and disadvantaged children are making in reading in the Reception Year. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has increased year on year for four years and standards are above national levels. However, last year, boys' standards in reading were lower than those in writing. Leaders and governors have reviewed reading resources and improved the teaching of phonics skills. The curriculum for reading in early years is wide. Children read together from exciting 'big books' and share stories in small groups. Teachers devise games and 'treasure hunts' in the outside area to encourage reluctant readers to practise their reading.
- All children read regularly with an adult. Disadvantaged children are well supported through daily individual reading sessions. When teaching reading, staff use effective prompts and questions to help children sound out words and make sense of what they are reading. However, the records held on children's reading do not always show sufficiently clearly what children know and can do. Consequently, the guidance given to adults who read with children, including parents, about what children need to learn next lacks the sharpness needed to maximise children's progress.
- Lastly, I looked at your use of additional funding to support the inclusion of pupils who are disadvantaged. I reviewed the steps you have taken to increase attendance and reduce exclusion. You and governors are rightly proud of the very high standard of pupils' current behaviour. However, you have had to take robust action in the past when a small number of pupils have not met your expectations. You have used additional funding to provide specialist behaviour and mentoring support for those very few pupils who need it. This has been highly effective in ensuring that the most vulnerable pupils remain in school and achieve well. Records show that their behaviour has improved markedly and that there has been no need to use exclusion since May 2017. There has also been

effective development of school lunchtimes using additional funding. Pupils enjoy the many exciting ways to stay active and they play together harmoniously.

- The school's historically lower rate of attendance of disadvantaged pupils is being overcome. In all cases, you can demonstrate significant improvements this year for individual pupils. You have used funding to identify individual families' difficulties and provide them with appropriate challenge and support. You have extended the time administrative staff are available to follow up pupil absence. This has also strengthened procedures to ensure that pupils are safe.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to deepen pupils' achievement in mathematics by developing pupils' skills in expressing their mathematical reasoning
- teachers in the early years make sharper use of assessment information to help children make even stronger progress in reading.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Marriott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leaders. Together, we observed teaching and learning in all classes and discussed pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics and reading. I scrutinised a range of pupils' work in their mathematics, science and humanities books. I considered a range of documentation, including your summary of the school's effectiveness and the school development plan. I met with a representative of the local authority and with a group of governors. I took account of the work of the governing body through scrutinising the minutes of their meetings. I reviewed the school's procedures for safeguarding and discussed these with staff. I met with a group of pupils to discuss their experience of school and talked to pupils during the lunchtime break. I spoke to parents before the start of the school day. I took account of the views of parents through the 88 comments and responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the views of staff and pupils expressed in 22 responses to the staff questionnaire and 54 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

