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Mr Barnaby Ash
Headteacher
St Mark's Church of England School
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Dear Mr Ash

Short inspection of St Mark's Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 2018 with Ray Hennessy, Ofsted Inspector, and Teresa Hill, Ofsted Inspector, 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 May 2015.

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.**

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2014, you have made significant changes to staffing. With new appointments last year and this, you have added capacity to your leadership team. Now, you are at a point when your plans can be led effectively. It is, though, too soon to see the impact.

You and the new team, supported by the governors and the local authority, have tackled many difficult issues, not least the fall in pupil numbers. Your determination to improve the school for the pupils, which takes above the national number of in-year transfers, is paying dividends. Your pupil numbers are on the rise, which enables you to plan more effectively for the future.

Since the last inspection, you have tried to improve the consistency of teaching, but this has not been achieved yet. There is a high proportion of new staff who are still in the early stages of developing their practice. The new assistant headteacher in charge of teaching and learning has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. As a result, she has made teachers more aware of the needs of the pupils they teach. Most teachers use better questioning techniques now, to engage pupils. Sadly, pupils' work is not good enough, including instances where they are not recording their learning effectively. As a result, pupils are not

making good progress in many subjects. Too few teachers have high expectations of what can be achieved.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are secure. With the support of the governors, you have put a perimeter fence around the school site to protect pupils. Previously, it was an open site and the local community used the grounds as a thoroughfare. You recognised the dangers for pupils and staff and acted swiftly to amend this. You train staff on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation and the influences of radicalisation and extremism. Checks on the recruitment of staff comply with statutory guidelines. However, some aspects of recording and analysing are not sharp enough, such as the chronology of incidents and actions taken.

Inspection findings

- First, we discussed the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Successful work was undertaken last year with a group of disadvantaged girls. This helped raise their self-esteem and their belief in being successful. As a result, the difference between the achievements of boys and girls diminished in the examinations at the end of key stage 4. The work you have done to improve teaching and make staff more aware of disadvantaged pupils and their barriers to learning is starting to make an impact, particularly in mathematics. However, the improvements are incremental and not yet rapid enough.
- Next, we looked at what is being done to improve the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Currently, there is no effective tracking of these pupils' progress and the quality of their work is not checked regularly. Critical elements of their education, health and care plans are missing. Too often, pupils with SEND are withdrawn from learning with the rest of their year group. At times, this impedes their learning and social awareness. The quality of the work of teaching assistants varies, and this has an impact on the progress of pupils with SEND. A new SEND coordinator was appointed in September 2018. She has an accurate view of what needs to be done, but it is too soon for her to have made any measurable impact.
- Finally, we looked at what is done to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence overall, and for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. You appointed an attendance officer in September 2018. The new officer has made effective changes to procedures. She ensures that parents and carers are contacted as soon as a pupil is absent. This timely intervention has improved attendance and, most importantly, ensured that the whereabouts of pupils are known to ensure their safety. Because of this work, attendance is improving, and persistent absence is reducing, but these are not yet in line with national averages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- expectations of what pupils can achieve are raised, so teachers do not accept work that is not of a high standard
- pupil premium funding continues to be used effectively to improve disadvantaged pupils' academic and personal development
- pupils with SEND make good progress with support that stretches their learning further, so that they achieve their potential
- a focus on improving the attendance of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, is maintained, so that attendance is at least in line with national averages.

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 Bath and North East Somerset Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kathy Maddocks
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, senior leaders and governors. We spoke formally with groups of pupils. We visited lessons in English, mathematics and science, many jointly with you and an assistant headteacher. We looked at the quality of pupils' work and considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including safeguarding. We considered 56 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 56 comments written by parents, plus the 77 responses from pupils and 51 responses from staff to the Ofsted online survey.