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Ms Philippa Golding  
Headteacher  
St Peter's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School  
Church Lane  
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WD3 8HD

Dear Ms Golding

### **Short inspection of St Peter's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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 October 2014.

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

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

The school has a positive ethos where pupils enjoy learning and staff morale is high. It provides a stimulating learning environment for its pupils. The broad curriculum inspires pupils to love learning and be curious. A group of parents told me that their children enjoy their learning so much at school that they talk about it outside of school and this 'makes for healthy debate at home'. This is reflected in the vibrant displays around the school as well as in conversation with the pupils. Pupils enthusiastically described activities that teachers provide to enrich the curriculum such as: hosting a temporary planetarium in the school hall; learning to paint from a professional painter; experiencing life as an Egyptian with costumes; and special activities to help pupils to learn what life was like in ancient Egypt.

Leaders have successfully managed a large number of unexpected staff changes over the last twelve months. The school is now fully staffed and has a new senior leadership team. When I met with all staff at the start of the inspection a strong team spirit was apparent. All staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire agreed that they enjoy working at the school and that they are proud to be part of the staff at the school.

Leaders' decisive actions to alter the way the curriculum was delivered during a challenging period for the school ensured that pupil outcomes continued to improve. Over time, pupils have achieved well. They make good progress and attainment in the national tests continues to rise. For example, in the 2018 national tests pupils' attainment was high in both Year 2 and Year 6.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are very much aware that boys do not achieve at the very high levels achieved by girls at the school. They have also recognised that some approaches to teaching introduced with the new curriculum have had unintended negative effects on the ability for the most able to make rapid progress in all subjects. Effective plans are in place to resolve this issue.

The school has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. In order to improve communication with parents and carers, leaders have developed a range of ways that parents can find out about events at school and how well their children are doing. Parents in conversation with me said that while communication was once poor, it has improved a great deal due to the changes that the school has introduced. The majority of parents who replied to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that they receive valuable information from the school about their children's progress.

The leadership team's good work to improve the progress of most-able pupils has started to work. Using up-to-date research and ideas from specialist advisers, leaders have introduced new teaching methods and greater challenge for the most able in certain subjects. The positive results of these new approaches are evident both in pupils' work in class and their work in books. Pupils also told me that the new teaching methods make their learning harder and help them learn better by making them think more carefully about what they are learning. The evidence, therefore, justifies the decision that all teachers adopt these new practices.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils' well-being is of paramount importance to leaders and governors, who regularly and carefully evaluate safeguarding arrangements to ensure that pupils are kept safe from harm. Leaders carry out all of the checks required to ensure that adults are suitable to work with pupils. The record of these checks is accurately maintained and reviewed regularly by governors. Staff carefully record concerns about pupils and follow these up swiftly. All staff and governors have undergone thorough training and have up-to-date knowledge of the latest guidance to keep children safe.

Effective measures are in place and they are implemented to ensure pupils' health and safety including when they arrive and leave the premises. You also assess and reduce risks to ensure that pupils are safe during educational visits away from school.

The ethos leaders have established at the school ensures that pupils know that bullying is not tolerated at the school. Pupils have a good understanding of what bullying is and know how to deal with it when it occurs. Pupils told me bullying is rare at the school and that teachers deal with bullying effectively when it happens. This is confirmed by the overwhelming majority of pupils' responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

## **Inspection findings**

- The school development plan identifies the difference between the achievement of boys and girls across the school as an improvement priority. Although boys achieve above national averages in all subjects in key stage 1 and key stage 2, it is clear that they are not achieving as well as the girls. I wanted to see how well the school was doing to close this gap.
- Leaders have accurately analysed relevant information and carefully chose the necessary training to help create improvement plans. Strategies to improve teaching so that boys achieve as well as girls are starting to take effect. For example, when teaching writing in Year 5 and Year 6 staff have adapted the curriculum for history in order to improve the quality of boys' writing. Pupils' persuasive writing about Anglo-Saxon times showed improved use of language by the boys. Writing in books shows that boys are thinking more carefully about their writing and developing more sophisticated sentences and paragraphs.
- The changes made to the library collection are starting to encourage boys to read more regularly and to enjoy reading. Pupils have access to a wide range of books that are chosen based on their interests. Pupils told me, and you confirmed, that the school buys books that pupils request if they are not already in the collection. One boy told me that he now loves reading because he has access to the books that he wants to read.
- I also looked at the actions leaders are taking to improve achievement in the early years. Leaders have given careful consideration to the way early years teachers plan challenging learning activities and help children take next steps in their learning. You have also appointed new leaders to the area. The new leaders are starting to make the changes you expect.
- Our joint visits to classrooms in the early years showed many strengths in teaching and learning. We saw children concentrating on activities over long periods of time and supporting each other in their learning. Children proudly showed us their learning and achievements and many of these were of a high standard. Even so, records of children's learning show that strong progress and high standards in the early years have not been sustained consistently over time.
- During our visits, we saw that some children were being given activities that were too easy and this limited their progress. Teachers are not consistently matching activities closely to children's varying abilities and moving them on quickly when they show that they are ready. The new leadership of the early years has started to improve the way teachers plan and deliver learning activities. These new approaches have not yet been appraised to ensure that they are working well.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attainment for boys in reading, writing and mathematics improves so that they match the high attainment of girls
- leaders fully embed and evaluate the changes in early years provision to ensure that they are making the difference intended.

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

Al Mistrano  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I spoke with you, other members of the leadership team, three governors, staff, a representative from the local authority, pupils and parents. We observed learning and teaching in all year groups apart from Year 1 and Year 6. With you and members of the senior leadership team, I scrutinised pupils' work in English and mathematics. Some pupils in Year 5 read to me.

I scrutinised a range of documents including the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, a sample of safeguarding documentation, leaders' self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.

I scrutinised 59 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, 33 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and eight responses to the online staff questionnaire.