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Mrs Sarah Grier
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Controlled Infants School
19 Church Green
Witney
Oxfordshire
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Dear Mrs Grier

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Controlled Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a clear vision that balances the school's strong Christian ethos with high aspirations for every pupil's academic progress. Staff share your ambition. They work very well together and are fully committed to the school's mission of 'Together we love to learn and learn to love'.

Pupils enjoy school, are polite and behave well. They strive hard to improve their work and take pride in their success. Pupils are clear about what they need to do in each lesson. They work with purpose and have exceptionally positive attitudes to their learning. One pupil said: 'I like lessons because we learn and have fun at the same time.'

Parents value the staff's work and say that their children are very happy coming to school. They greatly appreciate that their children are known and understood as individuals. Parents spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. One parent commented: 'The support that myself and my daughter are given is fantastic and all the teachers and staff are approachable and understanding. It's the best school I could possibly wish for.' Another parent stated, 'My child loves school and learning.'

Governors are very knowledgeable and committed to the school, bringing a wide range of skills and experience to their roles. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and share your determination that both the

learning and personal development needs of pupils are fully met. The trustees of the Oxford Diocese Schools Trust monitor the progress in the school effectively. They provide well-targeted support for you in your determination to improve pupils' outcomes.

At the last inspection, you were asked to strengthen teaching by extending the outdoor learning opportunities for children in the Reception class. Children in Reception make rapid progress because adults ensure that learning opportunities are challenging. This is the case inside the classroom and in the exciting and well-planned outside space. You have ensured that children's speech and language development and their mathematical skills are supported through carefully designed activities in the outdoor learning environment.

You are aware that pupils' progress in writing is not as strong as their progress in reading and mathematics. This is because teachers do not consistently challenge pupils to develop their writing skills. There is also scope to rehearse and develop pupils' skills through writing for different purposes across the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that there is a strong safeguarding culture across the whole school. Leaders and governors are clear that keeping pupils safe is a priority for all staff. Staff are well trained. They are vigilant and, when necessary, report concerns appropriately and take decisive action.

You make meticulous recruitment checks, ensuring that all adults in school are fully vetted before working with pupils. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and of high quality.

Staff know pupils and their families well and, when required, act swiftly to provide the right support. Your team builds very strong relationships with pupils. The pupils who spoke to me said that they feel entirely safe in school. They also said that bullying is rare and that they know how to keep themselves safe, giving examples of how they keep themselves safe when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- You have carefully reviewed the way that writing is taught and the school's new approach ensures that skills are developed systematically. Boys and girls are making rapid progress. Writing skills are strengthened through the focus on providing time for pupils to talk through their ideas fully, and by enriching their vocabulary. This is linked successfully with the development of pupils' reading skills. Teachers demonstrate clearly the quality of writing expected before pupils begin their own work. This helps pupils to know what is needed to be successful.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils, ensuring that they write for a range of purposes, in different styles and for different audiences. Teachers make sure that pupils accurately employ the language features for each type of writing. High standards are also evident for pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils

demonstrate that they know exactly what to do to improve in their own writing. Occasionally, the work to develop pupils' writing is not pitched at the right level for their needs and abilities. As a result, progress is not as strong as it could be.

- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make strong progress in writing. This was evident in the learning we observed and when I evaluated their progress over time in their books. Effective provision and the support that pupils receive in class and at additional times throughout the school day are enabling them to make rapid gains in knowledge and understanding. Leaders, including governors, ensure that additional funding has a positive impact on the achievement of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils, particularly in writing. Leaders know how much funding is available and articulate precisely how this is spent to benefit individuals and groups of pupils. For example, some pupils receive targeted, good-quality support for spelling. Leaders make effective plans to support pupils who are identified as having particular needs and check carefully that the improvements occur within the expected timescales.
- You have developed a vibrant, interesting and engaging curriculum. Pupils, including children in early years, are provided with an extensive range of experiences beyond the classroom, including many extra-curricular opportunities. This is a strength of the school and reflects your determination that pupils will encounter first-hand experiences while maintaining a strong focus on their basic skills. Learning is enhanced through numerous, well-planned educational visits, visitors in class and engaging homework. One example of this is a parent, who works at the Museum of Oxford, bringing in fossils and bones to provide an excellent start to the Year 1 topic on dinosaurs. The curriculum challenges pupils to be reflective about what they are learning. My scrutiny of the work in pupils' books and discussions with them and teachers show that effective links are made between subjects. However, it is clear that pupils have limited opportunities to develop and improve their skills by writing for different purposes in other subjects.
- Leaders monitor the attendance of individuals and groups rigorously, including the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Staff work well with pupils, their families and outside agencies to support regular and punctual attendance. You use effective ways to improve the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent. For example, breakfast club helps to ensure that pupils have a good start to the school day and are ready to learn. The school's own information shows that overall attendance for the last academic year improved and was above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils was also above the national average. Consequently, this group is making good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of writing is consistent in matching the attainment and needs of all pupils
- pupils have more opportunity to develop their skills by writing for a range of

purposes across the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Oxford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Blackmore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, members of the staff team and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with your lead teacher for pupil premium and the leaders for mathematics and English. Together, you and I visited classrooms to observe learning. In addition, I looked in depth at pupils' books and work.

I met with a representative of the Diocese of Oxford and two representatives of the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust. I had a meeting with a group of pupils to gather their views of the school and considered 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 29 free-text comments. I also spoke with several parents at the end of the school day. I considered the school's own information about pupils' progress, the self-evaluation document and school improvement plan. I also met with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead and reviewed documentation and records about safeguarding.