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Mr David Lodge
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lodge

Short inspection of Countess Anne Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 2019, 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 school was judged to be good in June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide inspirational leadership which has moved the school on significantly since the previous inspection. You have set out an aspirational vision for educational excellence, which is totally supported by governors and staff. Leadership is highly developed across the school, and your team of leaders are very capable in their different roles. They deliver a highly effective curriculum and carefully track pupils' achievements in different subjects so that teaching can be adjusted quickly where needed. Newer developments for teaching thinking skills, mathematics and writing are continually checked for their impact. As a result, you have developed a highly reflective school which draws on professional research and staff talents in order to deliver a high-quality education.

The levels of care and personal guidance offered to children and their families are exceptional. Pupils' behaviour and relationships are impeccable throughout the school and they are very committed to learning well and always helping one another. They feel totally safe in school and fully support the 'golden values' which they and their parents helped you design. These values include perseverance and respect, and along with the school's Christian ethos, they are fundamental to pupils'

learning and personal development. Parents offer unanimous support in their commendation for the school and describe the quality of education and care as 'faultless'. Many speak of 'the extra mile' offered to every child and family.

You pay meticulous attention to pupils' wider personal development. Your commitment to equality of opportunity in this work is also highly commendable. As a result, every pupil is able to enjoy an exceptional range of activities. These include excellent singing, high proficiency in musical instruments, many sporting achievements and high-quality field trips to locations such as Snowdonia. The pupils are also skilled gardeners and their efforts have been recognised at a national level.

Pupils are making very strong progress and achieve high standards in the full range of subjects taught across the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Since the previous inspection, you have responded to national changes made to the curriculum in order to develop highly effective teaching of knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy.

You pay constant attention to the quality of teaching and different pupils' progress. As a result, any previous, slight differences between the progress of different pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), boys and girls, have been addressed. However, on occasion, small numbers of pupils find it difficult to use their knowledge when applying it to the most challenging work in mathematics.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of parental involvement in children's assessment in the early years. You have achieved this. Parents commend the school's work, including arrangements that are made for their children prior to joining so that they make a strong start. You were also asked to improve the way teachers use assessment information to improve pupils' progress. You have addressed this very well. Across the school, teachers use their accurate views about pupils' abilities to plan a highly effective curriculum that helps all pupils to learn well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All statutory training is delivered and regularly updated in line with current guidance. Checks on the suitability of staff, volunteers and all who regularly visit the school are carried out and recorded in an exemplary manner.

There are well-established safeguarding systems within school, and leaders and governors regularly check on their effectiveness. Staff are highly vigilant and quickly refer any concerns. Leaders respond quickly and work closely with a wide range of appropriate agencies when pupils are thought to be at risk. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that staff will help them if they have any concerns. Pupils also know how to keep themselves safe on the internet. You have established a commendable culture for building pupils' confidence and speaking out on many things. Consequently, they communicate their shared values, and the school's

rejection of bullying, with great maturity. In addition, the school's very strong work on fundamental British values enables pupils to identify and resist ideas which could be extremist in nature.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry during the inspection looked at how well pupils are taught in writing and mathematics in key stage 2. In 2018, a small number of boys and girls of different abilities had not made the same strong progress in writing or mathematics that they had made in reading. From the start of the inspection, it was clear that written literacy and mathematics are very high priorities at the school. Your staff have decisively addressed the quality of teaching for all pupils in key stage 2 and it is highly effective.
- There are significant strengths in the teaching of writing and the school has paid close attention to the improvement of pupils' vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and grammar, especially for boys. Pupils' spoken communication and language skills are promoted very well by teachers' use of questioning, discussion, and performance arts. Across the full curriculum, they are provided with excellent opportunities which develop the purpose of their extended writing in ways suited to different subjects and genres. One good example is the exceptional, reflective writing seen in religious education. Well selected books, plays and other resources capture the interest of pupils, including boys. In addition, careful use of time allows pupils to study challenging texts to considerable depth.
- Mathematics is also taught very well at key stage 2. The curriculum and teaching help pupils secure a deep understanding of their foundation knowledge in number, arithmetic and calculation. This has clearly addressed the achievement of pupils of all abilities, including girls. Teachers' explanations of concepts and rules are very strong. Challenging questions are used to assess pupils' thinking. Pupils often articulate their understanding by writing up their own summary of a rule or concept. Teachers frequently check on pupils' understanding, which is very effective for pupils of all abilities, including girls. Pupils are routinely challenged to attempt difficult mathematical problems, and the vast majority are successful. However, on occasion, a small number of pupils are less confident in applying their knowledge to problems. This happens when teachers' explanations are not as effective in helping them develop their use of methods.
- My third line of enquiry was to look at the teaching of mathematics in the early years. Your very accurate self-evaluation demonstrated that numeracy skills were lower than those typical for their age on entry to the school. Children have made very strong progress in the current academic year. Highly effective teaching has secured their strong understanding of numbers, counting and measuring.
- My next line of enquiry was to see how well pupils are learning across the full curriculum of the school. Your self-evaluation and published content suggested that this could be a significant strength. Highly effective planning delivers rich and challenging study programmes across the different subjects. There is also a very strong approach to the teaching of thinking skills, which helps pupils understand how to use their knowledge in order to make strong progress.

Consequently, pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding very well.

- My final line of enquiry was to look at your arrangements and those of governors for checking on the performance of the school and leading improvement. You hold highly accurate views about the quality of education provided. You pay systematic attention to a full range of evidence. You then work meticulously to steer those areas identified for attention. Your leaders and governors also focus on these priorities. Improvement planning is ambitious and also sets out realistic and well-considered steps to achieve your goals.
- Governors' approaches to supporting you and holding you to account are extremely thorough. Their regular visits and activities are highly effective in identifying strengths and remaining areas for attention. They thoroughly complement your work to secure the positive direction the school is taking.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- higher level mathematics work in key stage 2 is explained more precisely so that all pupils are able to draw on their knowledge and follow the methods being practised.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, 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

David Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your leadership team, governing body, staff responsible for the single central record and the leader responsible for children with SEND. We discussed the work of the school, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. Teaching in all key stage 2 classes was observed. Lessons in early years and Year 2 were also visited. Pupils were asked about their learning and work was checked in their books. I talked to pupils at lunchtime to gather their views about school and to determine if they felt safe and the typicality of their behaviour.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's information about pupils' achievement. The school's evaluation of its work was reviewed, together with action plans. Responses from 35 parents to Parent View, and the free-text responses from 21 parents were taken into account. The views of 14 staff and 13

pupils, submitted through Ofsted surveys, were also considered. I also took account of a letter submitted by a member of staff.