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Mr Paul Marnell  
Headteacher  
St Michael's Church of England Primary School  
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Dear Mr Marnell

### **Short inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 the school was judged to be good in March 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.**

The school's roll has grown considerably. Since the last inspection, the governance of the school has undergone considerable change. In December 2015, the school was a founder member of the Barchelai Trust, a small, local, multi-academy trust (MAT). In January 2019, the larger Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust assumed responsibility for the operation and management of the schools in the Barchelai Trust. At the same time, you became the headteacher, having previously served as head of school. Some senior leaders in your school continue to work part-time in other schools in the MAT to support them.

In recent years, leaders and those responsible for governance have not secured consistently high academic standards either for pupils overall or for groups of pupils. The school's published outcomes have generally been below the national average. In particular, key stage 2 pupils' progress from their starting points at key stage 1 has been weaker than it should have been. Inspection evidence showed that current pupils' progress is improving as leaders establish clear expectations for how subjects are taught. It remains inconsistent, however, in part because of the relative inexperience of some teachers and middle leaders.

Leaders have addressed in part the areas for improvement identified at the last

inspection. Teachers set work for the most able that generally presents an appropriate level of challenge, and the most able pupils in the school make at least as much progress as their peers. Similarly, staff are aware of the need to interest boys in their work. I saw boys consistently enjoying their learning during my visit, but their progress still lags behind that of girls in the school, particularly in writing. There remains work to do to develop the role of subject leaders.

Leaders explained how the school had set clearer expectations for the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and the impact was clear in the writing workbooks that I scrutinised. Since January, teachers have been encouraging pupils to use their increasing knowledge of these features in the pieces that they compose themselves. As a result, the quality of their writing is beginning to improve. Pupils will benefit further from these very recent changes when teachers across the school have implemented them consistently.

Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to their learning are good. They are polite and courteous. In the classroom, pupils concentrate well, and collaborate readily with each other when asked to do so. They present their work neatly, even when it requires considerable effort to do so. In the playground, pupils play happily together. Their attendance is above the national average.

The school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a great strength. Older pupils explained to me that the expectation that they would work with classmates who were not their friends had helped them to respect those who differ from themselves. Through a curriculum which incorporates regular visits to the places where different faiths worship, they learn to understand and value the social and religious diversity of the local area. The school provides pupils with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership and represent their opinions to school leaders. The school's values of readiness, respect and responsibility are very much a reality.

Children get off to a good start in the school. Many join the school with skills below those typical for their age but they settle quickly and behave well. The classrooms and the outdoor learning area provide children with a stimulating environment. Inspection evidence supports your view that the quality of teaching in the early years is good, and that children make strong progress. Nevertheless, the proportion of disadvantaged children who attain a good level of development continues to be below that of non-disadvantaged children.

Surveys conducted by the school show that parents and carers are generally pleased with the education that you provide. Those parents I met personally confirmed this and said that it was easy to resolve any concerns. Parent View identified some doubts about pupils' behaviour, which were not borne out by this inspection.

The school building is bright, secure and well maintained. Attractive displays celebrate pupils' achievements and stimulate their further interest.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a well-established culture of safeguarding in the school. All arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders have made sure that staff are thoroughly trained to identify any problems that pupils may face and are alert to signs that they may not be safe. Staff exercise their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty, although there have been no recent concerns about radicalisation or extremism. The school's records show that when a risk to pupils arises, leaders work effectively with parents to protect children. They involve a particularly wide range of other agencies, when appropriate, and persevere until they know that pupils' needs have been fully met.

Pupils told me that they feel entirely safe in school. Those that I spoke with said that bullying occurred only rarely, and they had every confidence that an adult would be able to resolve any issue promptly. Pupils were able to recall in good detail the advice that they have received on how to stay safe online. They spoke of learning about road safety, and the importance of healthy eating.

## **Inspection findings**

- The self-evaluation you submitted for this inspection was overgenerous, and did not fully recognise some of the school's weaknesses. However, during the inspection, leaders were more realistic, and showed a sound understanding of where the school needs to improve. Leaders' views on the teaching that we observed accorded very well with mine. The school's current development plans identify appropriate actions to address the areas in need of attention. Some of the measures for success lack the precision that would enable leaders and those responsible for governance to check easily on their impact.
- In 2018, disadvantaged pupils left Year 6 having made progress that was below the national average in reading and mathematics. The school spends the pupil premium very largely on additional staffing to teach and support the high proportion of the school's pupils who are disadvantaged. In reviewing the impact of the pupil premium, leaders have noted the outcomes but not sought to identify the success or otherwise of the individual strategies that the school has adopted. They have, therefore, not based current expenditure on a thorough evaluation of the past.
- The progress that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) leaving the school in 2018 had made was weak. Inspection evidence showed that in some instances the progress of pupils with SEND is improving. It remains uneven, however, and writing at key stage 1 is a particular concern. The recent admission of a small number of pupils with particularly acute educational needs has necessitated the abrupt reorganisation of the school's provision for this group of pupils.
- Governance arrangements are not yet fully embedded following the very recent transfer of the school to the larger MAT. Trust representatives were clear that oversight of many aspects of the school lies with the local academy board but responsibility for academic standards resides with the trust. It remains for the trust to ensure that plans and the arrangements to evaluate their impact enable

the trust to maintain a detailed and accurate view of the school's progress in raising achievement.

- The school has a long-standing commitment to a broad curriculum. Pupils told me that they enjoyed the range of subjects they study and their experience on educational trips. They benefit from good opportunities to develop their skills in music, art and physical education (PE), both in the classroom and through after-school clubs.
- The previous inspection report identified as an area for improvement the effectiveness of subject leaders in helping pupils to achieve well in the subjects for which they are responsible. Inspection evidence showed that this remains a priority. Pupils' attainment in subjects other than English and mathematics is inconsistent and too dependent on the knowledge and skills of the class teacher. Subject leaders, many of whom are new to post, are well established as sources of information for their colleagues. However, some currently lack the skills and experience to check on the quality of work in the subject and then contribute to improving the quality of teaching.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- through the sharp evaluation of the impact of the school's improvement plans, they secure sustained improvement in pupils' outcomes
- the pupil premium and additional money provided for pupils with SEND is spent effectively
- they train middle leaders to check on the quality of teaching in foundation subjects, and thereby improve standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Spoor  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders and representatives of the Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust. I held a telephone conversation with the chair of the local academy board. I also held informal conversations with other members of staff. I observed teaching jointly with senior leaders, including the

teaching of English, mathematics, PE and geography. I scrutinised pupils' work from the current academic year. I met with a group of pupils to gather their views, and spoke informally with several more. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I observed pupils' behaviour at social times and when they moved around the school.

I took account of the 35 recent responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including comments made using the free-text service. I looked at an extensive survey of parental opinion that the school had conducted. I also considered the 24 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I scrutinised a wide range of documents both electronically and on paper, including: the school's evaluation of its performance and its plans for improvement; an external review of the expenditure of the pupil premium conducted in February 2018; records of meetings held by the local academy board; a review of the school conducted by an adviser for the new MAT; policies; curriculum plans and records; and records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I looked in detail at records that show how the school keeps pupils safe.