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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Andrea Green
Headteacher
Wilbarston Church of England Primary School
School Lane
Wilbarston
Market Harborough
Leicestershire
LE16 8QN

Dear Mrs Green

Short inspection of Wilbarston Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your leadership of this small village school has created a positive and ambitious culture which encourages pupils to be aspirational learners. Relationships are good because staff know pupils well and are enthusiastic for what pupils can achieve. Pupils leave Year 6 well prepared for their secondary schools. For example, in 2018, a well-above-the-national-average proportion of pupils achieved the expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of their time at Wilbarston Church of England Primary School.

Together with governors and staff, you have ensured that the school is a stimulating and welcoming place to learn. Vibrant displays celebrating pupils' work reflect the school's Christian ethos and the high expectations you place on pupils and staff. Pupils are proud of their school. They are confident, behave well and enjoy learning. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly effusive in their praise of the school. An example of a comment typically expressing the views of many parents was, 'My children are so lucky to go to Wilbarston School. The countryside setting, close friendships across all age groups and supportive teachers, have created a very happy learning environment.'

School leaders' evaluation of the quality of education the school provides is accurate. You have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the

areas in need of improvement. Since the previous inspection there have been some staff changes and classes have been restructured. Leaders have prioritised training for staff and established supportive partnerships with schools within the Montsaye Community Learning Partnership as well as with other local schools. This has enabled teachers to share expertise and learn from best practice. These partnerships are improving the quality of teaching and learning. For example, the teacher for the Reception Year, appointed since the last inspection, has worked effectively with a specialist leader in early years education from a school within the trust. This supportive partnership has been instrumental in successfully addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Relevant policies and procedures for the early years are consistently applied and used to inform good practice and ensure that children are safe. Assessment systems are clear and easily accessible to all staff. The teacher uses her continual assessments of children's learning to plan a rich variety of activities to ensure that all children make the progress of which they are capable. The large majority of children attain a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year.

Members of the local governing board are passionate about the school and provide you with effective support and challenge. They are knowledgeable and visit school often to check on the progress of actions to secure improvements. They frequently share their findings with the board of trustees. This enables trustees to hold governors to account and ensures that any support for the school is accurately targeted to drive improvements. Governors have a good understanding of the local community and take an active part in school events and staff training. They place high importance on ensuring the well-being and safety of pupils. Governors have a comprehensive grasp of their roles and responsibilities, including the monitoring of the use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Staff and governors have received effective training. In addition, you provide staff with regular updates to ensure that they remain vigilant. They know how to deal with safeguarding concerns and are alert to the potential risks to pupils. They know what to do to keep pupils safe. You, and the other leaders for safeguarding, work well with external agencies and take decisive action when necessary to secure pupils' well-being.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are safe and get on well together. Pupils are certain that they can talk to adults about any worries they may have. They say that incidents of bullying or poor behaviour are infrequent, but when they do occur staff deal with them quickly and well. Pupils are respectful of others and have good relationships with their teachers. Typically, they say, 'Our school is a friendly and welcoming place and we all look after each other well. Our teachers always want us to do our best.'

Inspection findings

- The progress pupils make in reading and writing is not as good as in mathematics. You carried out extensive research and trialled proven teaching and

learning strategies to help drive improvements. However, some of these strategies did not have the impact you hoped for. Your dogged determination led you to take on the role of English leader to get to the root of what was preventing pupils from making stronger progress. You worked with teachers on activities such as scrutinising pupils' work and interviewing pupils about their reading preferences. You also worked with colleagues from within the trust and attended specialist external training to establish a fresh approach to the teaching of reading and writing that would better suit the needs of pupils at the school.

- You have successfully trained staff and introduced the new strategies to ensure that the teaching of reading is improving. During my visits to lessons with you, I could see that pupils from a very young age are exposed to a range of texts that extend their vocabulary. The joy of reading for pleasure is constantly promoted throughout the school. There is a clear emphasis on the importance of developing pupils' understanding of vocabulary through reading. Pupils animatedly told me about their current class books. For example, pupils in Year 2 are enjoying 'The Tear Thief' by Carol Ann Duffy while pupils in Year 5 and 6 are reading 'The Hobbit' by JRR Tolkien. During the inspection, pupils and staff came to school dressed as various characters from a variety of different texts as part of the school's celebration of World Book Day. Pupils were entranced as staff discussed and read aloud their favourite books.
- During our visits to lessons, I could see how teachers and teaching assistants ask pupils probing questions to make sure that they understand what they are reading. In addition, teachers collect and display words for pupils to remember and use in other contexts. They challenge pupils to think where they have read a word before and teach them ways to find out the meanings of words. For example, in one lesson, I heard a teacher encouraging a pupil to explain the word 'abyss' based on his previous knowledge so that he could apply it effectively in his writing.
- Observations of pupils' reading, scrutiny of pupils' books and information shared by leaders indicate that current pupils across the school are making good progress in their reading. However, the new approach to the teaching of reading is in the early days and is not yet fully embedded across all classrooms to be able to demonstrate consistently strong progress.
- In 2018, the progress that pupils made in their writing by the end of key stage 2 was significantly below average and in the lowest 10% of schools nationally. After successfully trialling the new approach to the teaching of writing in key stage 1, you recently implemented the same approach across key stage 2. School information and scrutiny of pupils' writing indicate that this approach is having a positive impact on pupils' writing. Pupils are encouraged to discuss their writing and share their ideas. They work together to improve and develop their choice of vocabulary so, as one pupil explained, 'My writing is the best it can be.' Nevertheless, there is still further time needed to establish fully the new approach to writing across the school so that sustained improvements in pupils' progress can be demonstrated.
- Teachers reinforce clear expectations for the style and quality of pupils' handwriting. This starts in the Reception Year and is consistently reinforced by

teachers throughout the school. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows significant improvements in the quality of pupils' handwriting.

- Through our discussions about the changes instigated to the teaching of reading and writing, you identified that teachers were keen to develop further their subject knowledge of English to ensure that they establish and maintain consistently high expectations for what pupils can achieve.
- Since the previous inspection, staff changes and improvements to the way provision for children in the Reception Year is planned have ensured that the quality of teaching and learning is enabling children to make good progress and achieve good outcomes in their learning.
- Leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths of the early years and the areas to develop and how these align with whole-school priorities. The teacher works closely with colleagues in other schools within the trust and meets with them regularly to share good practice and check the validity of her assessments. Children in the Reception Year get off to a flying start at school. They are self-assured and articulate. The variety of stimulating learning activities challenge children to extend their knowledge and understanding well. They become thoroughly absorbed in their learning as a result.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recently established strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning are thoroughly embedded to ensure that all pupils make consistently strong progress in reading and writing by the end of key stage 2
- teachers are provided with opportunities to further develop their subject knowledge of English.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Montsaye Community Learning Partnership, the director of education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the school business manager and the Reception Year teacher. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and I met with a group of pupils. I also spoke with pupils and staff during their breaktime and during lessons. I met with four members of the local governing board and had a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer of the trust.

You and I visited classrooms together. I looked at a range of pupils' work. We discussed the school's plans for improvement. I considered the 17 responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, the nine responses to the staff survey and the 22 responses to the pupil survey. I scrutinised evidence from a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance, procedures and records for safeguarding and behaviour, an analysis of attendance and minutes from meetings of the governing body. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.