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Mrs Claire Jackman
Headteacher
Great Easton Church of England (VA) Primary School
Great Easton
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Dear Mrs Jackman

Short inspection of Great Easton Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 May 2017, 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Since 2013, there have been several changes in the senior leadership team and teaching staff. With new impetus, you have developed an ambitious learning culture for pupils, staff and governors through your well-defined strategic vision. Leaders, including governors, and staff are united in the commitment to further improve outcomes for all pupils.

You have successfully created an environment where all staff feel valued and supported. Staff acknowledge your 'positive and inspiring leadership', saying that 'to be teaching at Great Easton is an absolute pleasure'. The local authority and the school improvement partner speak highly about your clear and purposeful leadership. They recognise the many improvements you have implemented over the last year, particularly the success you have had in working with other schools.

The school environment is welcoming. This is recognised by visitors and parents. Classrooms and corridors are bright and stimulating. Relationships within the classroom between adults and pupils, and between the pupils, are respectful. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, recognise that the school 'is a special, rich and encouraging environment for children to go to school'.

You and other leaders have responded well to the recommendations in the previous inspection report. For example, the school was asked to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers use the information they know about pupils to plan activities to meet their needs. You have achieved this successfully through sharing best practice with other schools and adopting a consistent whole-school approach to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics.

You have successfully established effective partnerships with other schools through which staff share knowledge and experience. This is enabling teachers to adapt and improve their teaching. Pupils are responding well to these changes and are making improved progress across the curriculum.

During the inspection, I visited lessons where it was evident that there was a real sense of enjoyment from pupils in their learning. Teachers skilfully plan interesting, exciting work that is suitable for different pupils' needs and abilities. Opportunities are provided to enable pupils to apply a range of skills. For example, pupils used their research skills to apply geographical understanding when writing a persuasive piece of text about Whitby. Additionally, they used this same context to include their historical knowledge about Bram Stoker. Evidence from leaders' monitoring, pupils' work and the school's assessment information confirms that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school is good.

The previous report asked leaders to develop the skills of middle leaders. While improvements have been made in the leadership of English, mathematics and science, you recognise that there is more work to be done. You are currently focusing on distributing leadership responsibility further among your new leaders. You agree that developing subject leadership will enable your middle leaders to assume more responsibility for improving pupils' outcomes at a whole-school level.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that the necessary checks are made on all staff prior to them taking up their appointments.

Pupils that I met during the inspection told me they feel safe in the school. One pupil commented, 'when you walk into the school, you know it is safe' and added that the school was like 'one big family'. Pupils told me that bullying 'didn't happen', but they are able to talk to the school's 'worry warriors' who will sort out any concerns. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum teaches pupils how to keep safe in a variety of situations, such as when crossing the road and on the internet. Pupils spoke about the school's internet safety days, were able to explain the dangers clearly and know what to do if they have any concerns.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I looked at a number of lines of enquiry. The first of these looked at leaders' systems to monitor the

achievement of pupils in reading and writing. This was because of previous underachievement in both these subjects for some pupils at the end of key stages 1 and 2.

- Your monitoring of pupil progress is rigorous and accurate. Leaders carry out a range of monitoring activities, including evaluating the impact of catch-up programmes, pupils' work and teachers' assessment information.
- Teachers and subject leaders attend constructive and rigorous pupil progress meetings. At these meetings, leaders identify pupils who may have barriers to learning or who are not making the progress they should from their starting points. All leaders pay close attention to the progress each pupil makes. This ensures that detailed information is shared and support to move learning on can be matched accurately to meet pupils' needs.
- Pupils who are not on track to make expected progress receive effective support to catch up. For example, focused small group support in reading and writing has resulted in more pupils currently making good progress from their individual starting points in reading and writing.
- My second line of enquiry looked at actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes in writing. This was because in 2016, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 achieving the expected standard in writing was below national figures. In addition, the progress of pupils, particularly boys, in writing was below average.
- Your detailed analysis of outcomes in writing identified that some pupils start Year 6 without some of the key skills they should have been taught earlier on in the school. As a result, pupils were not prepared well enough to meet the higher standards in writing. Leaders identified spelling as being a particular issue, preventing some pupils from reaching the required level of attainment and making the progress they should.
- With a whole-school focus on spelling and the introduction of individual targets for pupils, you are now beginning to see the impact of this structured, school-wide approach. Consequently, pupil outcomes in writing are improving. The quality and content of writing from Reception to Year 6 is of a very good standard. Pupils join their writing at a young age and present their work well. I observed boys in Year 2, engaged in their writing, carefully forming letters while joining handwriting. Their work was of a high quality, both in content and presentation.
- Leaders and teachers have worked together to ensure that teachers' judgements about the quality of pupils' writing are accurate. You work closely with schools in your partnership to share best practice, ensuring that teachers know the expectations of writing at different ages.
- Although more pupils are now exceeding expected progress in writing, ensuring that greater numbers of pupils reach the higher levels of achievement is a priority for the school. You recognise that providing pupils with regular opportunities to practise their writing skills in other subjects is one of the ways you and teachers are addressing this. Assessment information shows that current pupils are making good and better progress

and pupils' work demonstrates that the quality of their writing is a strength at the school.

- My final key line of enquiry was to establish the progress pupils make in reading in key stage 1. Although pupils met the expected levels of attainment in 2016, the progress made by pupils at the end of Year 2 to reach expected and higher levels of achievement was below national expectations. The school's daily programmes for supporting pupils to accelerate progress in reading are having a positive impact on outcomes.
- Additionally, the introduction of 'reading champions' and certificates of achievement in reading are having a positive impact on learning. Pupils told me that they love reading, 'because you can learn new words and write better English'.
- The school has introduced 'reading gladiators' to challenge the most able and the school library bus visits the school regularly with a wide range of books to choose from. This has inspired a love of reading throughout the school.
- Pupils who did not make expected progress have now caught up and demonstrate confidence and fluency when reading. Pupils who read to me were able to discuss the writer's choice of language, explaining the meaning of words such as 'fiendish'. Your accurate assessment information is showing that high proportions of pupils are on track to make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are provided with regular opportunities to practise their writing skills in other subjects
- more pupils achieve the higher standards in reading and writing
- middle leadership is strengthened, so that subject leaders are able to contribute positively to whole-school improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and governors.
- I visited each classroom and looked at examples of pupils' work. I observed

pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school.

- I spoke to pupils in and around the school and listened to pupils read.
- A number of documents were reviewed, including the school's records of monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation, pupil assessment and progress information, and the school improvement plan.
- I also took account of the 44 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire completed by parents, and 40 text messages from parents. I also considered the results provided by five members of staff in the school's staff questionnaire.