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Mr Stephen Dodd
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Dear Mr Dodd

Short inspection of Great Finborough Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 December 2016, 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Working closely with governors and the leadership team, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Standards and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have continued to improve and have kept pace with the national curriculum implemented in 2014 as well as the new end-of-key-stage assessments that were implemented in the summer. In addition, the school has expanded to include Years 5 and 6. Staff and pupils say that you lead the school with infectious enthusiasm for every child to achieve highly, academically as well as in the exciting range of enrichment activities offered to pupils.

A strength of the school is the extent to which leaders work collaboratively to establish a shared understanding of pupils' learning and progress. This results in well-focused actions which support and challenge pupils to ensure that they make good progress from the time they start school. Actions are also informed by the regular, individual discussions held with pupils. These identify aspects of learning and school life which support pupils to achieve well, as well as those which hinder learning. Teachers respond positively to the increased understanding of pupils' needs these discussions give them and make quick adjustments to secure pupils' engagement in learning.

Teachers adapt the curriculum each year to ensure that pupils experience a breadth of subjects as well as acquiring secure knowledge and skills as they progress through the school. Your drive and expectation of teachers to 'make learning real and exciting' are evident in pupils' work. Together with other leaders and staff, you have revisited how pupils organise and develop their work. Pupils' books show consistently well-presented, careful work and there is evident transfer of the literacy and mathematical skills they learn into the work they complete in other subjects. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported, through the effective use of learning aids and adult guidance, to develop the skills they need to learn well and to present their work appropriately.

At the time of the previous inspection, two areas were identified for improvement; to improve the school grounds and to improve national and international links. Because you have been through a building project to manage the expansion of the school, the external provision has not been fully redeveloped, although plans and fund-raising are in place to do this. All-weather external play surfaces have been added and you have staggered the lunchtime break so that the amount of space is appropriate for children to play in.

You have established links with a large inner-city school near Wembley. Pupils undertake exchange visits and through these learn about the diverse range of contexts in which people in this country live. Along with the diverse curriculum they study, this helps to prepare them for a life in modern Britain beyond their immediate environment.

I identified the achievement of pupils in Year 6 who achieved the expected standard at the end of key stage 1, described as middle-attaining pupils, as a line of enquiry for my visit. Outcomes in 2016 at the end of each key stage were good, with children achieving high standards at the end of Reception and similar standards being sustained across the school. Because cohorts are small, comparisons with national averages are difficult to make; however, higher attaining pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieved well. Overall, disadvantaged pupils achieved at least as well as, and often better than, other pupils nationally. You had also identified middle-attaining pupils' achievement as an area of focus. In the lessons we saw, and in pupils' work, there is evidence that these pupils are making good progress. In a small number of instances, the challenge for pupils is not sufficiently adjusted to ensure that they make all the progress of which they are capable.

I looked carefully at boys' achievement. Across the school, boys are achieving as well as girls. I spoke with a number of boys who have high expectations of themselves and expressed their interest in learning. In a few instances, where boys have special educational needs, they were receiving support that challenged them to make the most of their skills and knowledge. As a result, they are making good progress from their starting points.

I also discussed the wider provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The special educational needs coordinator regularly reviews the quality of provision for these pupils, seeks advice from wider agencies appropriately, and includes parents and pupils when reviewing pupils' progress. Although in some instances, the recorded feedback from parents and pupils is too minimal to be useful in shaping provision, overall it is strong. In some instances, advice and expertise the school has sourced and funded itself from educational psychologists have enabled staff to make specific changes to provision so that pupils' needs are met well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that behaviour is good. They understand the different forms that bullying can take and capably describe the importance of adhering to strict guidelines on e-safety and the sharing of personal information. They are confident that staff will deal with any problems that arise in school. Child protection procedures are appropriate and evidence demonstrates that wider agency involvement is sought when necessary. Staff safeguarding training is up to date, although interim reminders of expectations could be more detailed and regular.

A midday supervisor commendably confirmed her understanding, gained through training, of procedures in place to identify and report any concerns about pupils' welfare. Records of the suitability of staff to work with children include the details and checks that are statutory requirements. There is some tardiness in following up references for new appointments. Although these procedures lack rigour, they are sufficient to ensure that children in the school are safe. Similarly, risk assessments are in place and cover the relevant aspects of the school's work. However, the records showing that they are updated and shared with those who need to be aware of the risks are not sufficiently rigorous.

Inspection findings

- Governors have a detailed knowledge of the work of the school and a good understanding of pupils' achievement. They are rightly proud of the continual improvements made to the quality of teaching and to the standards achieved by pupils. Governors monitor the standards of teaching and pupils' outcomes effectively through reports from, and meetings with, senior leaders and also through visits to the school. Some aspects of their work are less rigorous, for example their monitoring of risk assessments. Governors have not ensured that the school's website contains all the information it should. For example, although recently ratified, a number of policies on the website are not dated in terms of when they were approved or when they need updating. Information on the use and impact of the pupil premium, while informative, does not meet the recently updated requirements.

- The school environment reflects the high expectations you have of pupils. Staff keep classrooms looking bright, neat and well organised. Learning is thoughtfully planned and resources are used well to support pupils. Consequently, pupils behave well in lessons and try hard to succeed. Staff are currently working to increase pupils' understanding of successful learning strategies. You are confident that this will enhance their already good attitudes to learning. A characteristic evident in most classes is the very strong relationships that exist between teachers and pupils. Classrooms are happy, harmonious places to be.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils are polite and courteous and are keen to discuss their learning, particularly the aspects they find most interesting. A pupil in Year 2 told me that literacy is 'very fun'; a Year 3 pupil in a mathematics lesson explained how much he enjoyed the subject, saying, 'I think I am good at it and I feel very happy when I do it'.
- The outstanding curriculum is enriched by an unusually wide range of different opportunities, activities and trips, culminating in an eight-day residential trip to the Outer Hebrides in Year 6. Enrichment activities include, for example, sailing, cricket, gymnastics and kayaking. Outdoor provision is used to engage younger learners well. The primary physical education and sport funding is significantly enhanced from the school's own budget to provide pupils with specialist coaching and access to local sporting facilities and clubs. These opportunities support pupils to learn about their own talents and to take responsibility. Parents I spoke to whose children have recently moved on to secondary school said that they are very well prepared to meet the new challenges they face.
- Teachers carefully organise lessons so pupils have a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn. These intentions are made clear to pupils in different ways and some are more successful than others. Recent changes to addressing weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar in pupils' work are making a difference to how well they develop and use their skills. The school's marking policy is not consistently applied and so feedback to pupils about their learning is variable. However, in some classes, misconceptions in lessons are quickly addressed so pupils learn well. You recognise that work is needed to ensure that strategies for setting and following up pupils' work need to be made more consistent. This is so that all practice matches the quality of the best and enables all groups of pupils to make all the progress they can.
- Standards in phonics are high. A group of children in the Reception class were enthusiastically engaged outside in using their knowledge to create words starting with 'ma', while others worked with their teacher to race to 'swat' the tricky words they were learning. Another group worked independently to spot and use the digraph 'ch'. Year 1 pupils used their knowledge confidently to spell unknown words such as 'trampoline'. These skills are taught well and make sure that pupils have a good start in developing their reading and writing skills.
- Pupils throughout the school enjoy reading and use their phonics skills as well as those of inference and deduction to read texts that are well matched to their ability. They say that teachers encourage them to read and suggest books they will enjoy.

- Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, expressed confidence in the school's work. This was endorsed in conversation with a number of parents arriving at school with their children, who said that their children are happy, safe and well looked after by the staff. The positive relationships which permeate the school community are a strong feature in pupils' success.
- Because you have not been able to recruit a new teacher who meets your expectations for the Year 5 and 6 class, you have taken on an almost full-time teaching commitment. This has secured continuing good progress for the pupils in these year groups. However, there is a resulting lack of rigour in improvement planning and monitoring. In the short term, this is manageable but over a longer period, the lack of specific, measurable targets set for improvement, and of monitoring against these, mean that governors cannot monitor well enough. Consequently, there is a risk that the current high standards will not be sustained.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- monitoring is rigorous and regular. This includes the headteacher's role in securing effective school improvement and sustaining the quality of teaching as well as governors' responsibility to monitor all aspects of safeguarding and the statutory requirements for the school's website
- the manner in which teachers share expectations of pupils' learning and provide feedback about how well pupils are doing is of a consistently high standard.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator to discuss the assessment of pupils' achievement, the quality of provision and your own analysis of the school's work. I spoke to a higher level teaching assistant and a midday supervisor. I also met with four governors and the school business manager. I scrutinised and discussed a range of documents, including improvement planning, self-evaluation, safeguarding and child protection records, analysis of pupils' achievement and minutes of governing body meetings. Together, you and I visited all classes in the school where I spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. I observed play at lunchtime, listened to pupils read and spoke to them about life at school.

Focus for the inspection

Prior to the inspection I identified the following aspects of the school's work for particular scrutiny:

- the quality of leadership and governance
- the progress made by middle-attaining pupils, including boys
- the quality of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the quality and breadth of the curriculum
- the rigour and appropriateness of safeguarding procedures.