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Mrs Fiona Wilce
Headteacher
St Mary and St John CofE VA Primary School
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Dear Mrs Wilce

Short inspection of St Mary and St John CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 April 2018, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, together with governors, have overcome the challenges presented by staff and leadership changes. You rightly identify the main areas for improvement and ensure that leaders at all levels check how well the school is moving towards its aims.

Your school is a happy place where pupils feel involved. They say learning is fun, which is reflected by one of the many positive comments received from parents and carers, 'The school provides my child with a positive, happy, inspiring learning environment.'

In the lessons we visited together, pupils were engaged and concentrated well. Pupils know what their teachers expect and they value the help they receive to improve. We saw some good examples of pupils developing their writing and deepening their mathematical understanding. When I listened to pupils read, they explained the plot and the feelings and actions of main characters. Pupils say they enjoy reading and that it helps to develop their writing.

Pupils told me they get on well together. Newcomers said they feel welcomed. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about the values of respect and tolerance, and the

importance of fairness. As one pupil put it, 'It's not just about faith. Everyone is different and should be treated fairly.' Pupils help each other and play their part in school life. They learn about different geographical regions, British and world history and major religions, with a positive effect on their understanding of those beyond the school community.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that subject leaders know about pupils' progress and the strengths and areas for development in their subjects. You have developed leaders' skills well. They model good practice, evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and know how well all groups of pupils are doing. Newly appointed leaders waste no time in implementing improvements.

Since the previous inspection, governors' understanding of the curriculum has strengthened. Governors have good links with subject leaders. They know what is being done to improve the school and they check that any spending is effective in raising pupils' achievement.

You know that, previously, some pupils in key stage 1 did not achieve as well as they might. You are addressing this well. You now ensure that information about children's progress during the early years is built upon well during Year 1. You have reorganised teaching in key stage 1 and you and senior leaders check pupils' progress frequently. You provide extra well-placed support to raise the achievement of those pupils now in Year 3 who did not reach their full potential during their time in Year 2.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the teaching of writing. You make sure that teachers' assessment of pupils' work is accurate. You and subject leaders guide staff on how to improve and enable the sharing of expertise within the school and with other schools. You and your staff motivate pupils to write. Pupils write frequently and in a range of subjects. The pupils I spoke to during my visit said they enjoy writing and they showed me some of their interesting writing in history and geography.

You and subject leaders work determinedly to ensure that pupils' progress in writing is strong. You continue to introduce new ways to build upon existing improvements. During my visit, I saw teachers developing pupils' language and extending their vocabulary in readiness to write. However, this approach is too new for leaders to yet evaluate whether it is consistently effective in all classes. Pupils achieve well in learning about grammar, punctuation and spelling but work in books shows that pupils do not always spell accurately whenever they write.

Your analysis of standards in mathematics by the end of Year 6 has led to a new approach to teaching. You and subject leaders use examples of good practice from other schools to inform the changes you make to the curriculum. There is a whole-school approach to developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills in order to deepen their grasp of mathematical concepts. I saw some good examples in lessons and in books of pupils demonstrating their reasoning. However, for some

pupils, tasks are set too high to enable them to master their skills solidly. The most able pupils sometimes repeat what they already know before they move on to more challenging work.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that staff receive regular training so that they know how to keep pupils safe. The vetting procedures for adults who work with pupils are thorough.

You keep detailed and secure records of any child protection concerns that may arise. Your positive links with external agencies, parents and families enable you to deal promptly with any welfare issues.

You and your staff make good use of outside agencies and visitors, such as the local police force and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, to provide pupils with guidance on how to stay safe. Older pupils benefit from visits to outside locations, such as the Warning Zone, to enhance their understanding of safety issues.

Pupils know about the various forms that bullying may take. You make sure that the curriculum promotes online safety and helps pupils to understand how to deal with any problems they may encounter.

Inspection findings

- Leaders correctly identify that the continued improvement of the teaching of writing and mathematics is a main priority. Their positive actions, based upon a thorough evaluation of pupils' progress and of the curriculum, are improving the quality of teaching and raising standards in these subjects.
- A consistent approach to assessing pupils' progress means that teachers in key stage 1 are now well informed about the progress children have made during the early years. Consequently, pupils' skills are now being built upon more quickly than previously.
- The school's information shows that more pupils in Year 2 are now on track to reach the expected standards than in 2017, with a marked improvement in reading, writing and mathematics.
- After a dip in standards in writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 in 2016, leaders' efforts led to improvement in 2017. These improvements are being sustained and built upon strongly. Pupils who are currently in Year 6 are achieving well, particularly in writing.
- Teachers motivate pupils in their writing through interesting topics. Leaders' current focus on enriching pupils' writing with wide-ranging vocabulary has got off to a good start but it is too soon to see the full effect on pupils' achievement.
- The teaching of spelling is not sufficiently well structured to ensure that pupils spell accurately by systematically building upon what they already know.
- In mathematics, pupils in all classes are developing reasoning and problem-

solving skills. However, the pitch of work is not always well enough matched to pupils' abilities to ensure that they make the best possible progress.

- The curriculum and the school's strong ethos promote important values and pupils' understanding of social and cultural diversity. This helps to prepare pupils suitably for life in modern Britain.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently adopt the school's new approaches to enrich pupils' writing
- the teaching of spelling is effective
- teachers provide tasks in mathematics which develop pupils' skills and deepen their understanding effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Vivienne McTiffen
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and key stage and subject leaders. We looked at samples of writing and mathematics in pupils' books and discussed progress information. I also met the chair of the governing body, along with five other governors. I visited some classes with you to observe the teaching of English and mathematics. I met with a group of pupils and listened to some pupils read. I spoke to pupils about their learning during lessons. I also spoke to pupils during playtime and took account of 19 responses to the pupils' survey. I analysed the 69 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 67 written comments submitted by parents. I took account of the 15 responses to the questionnaire completed by staff. I looked at documentation relating to safeguarding and discussed the school's safeguarding procedures. I scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks. I also looked at the school's development plan and self-evaluation.