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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Rachel Hurding
Headteacher
The Ellis Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School
School Street
Hemingfield
Barnsley
South Yorkshire
S73 0PS

Dear Mrs Hurding

Short inspection of The Ellis Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment in September 2016, you have brought strong leadership to the school and have secured a culture of high expectations of pupils' achievement that all staff subscribe to. You have worked extremely closely with staff and a supportive governing body to build a real sense of teamwork and an ethos in which pupils can thrive.

One of the first actions you did following your appointment was to build a strong and cohesive leadership team. What became very evident during my visit was the sense of shared responsibility and trust between all your leaders. Senior and middle leaders are very ambitious for the school, and are clear about their determination to work with you to drive further improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

When I visited classrooms, I observed well-behaved pupils who were engaged and enjoying their learning. It was a pleasure so see older pupils grappling with complex problems in mathematics, and younger children in the early years and key stage 1 fully engrossed in their learning, particularly in phonics. Around the school, pupils

are courteous and polite. Pupils I spoke to during lunch said how much they liked the school and felt that all adults treated them fairly.

Since your appointment, you have taken firm action to address the recommendations from the last inspection. Pupils are now clear about what they are capable of achieving and the challenging targets they are set. Evidence in pupils' books shows that they are applying their writing skills very effectively in different subjects. The quality of the vocabulary they use and the use of grammar, punctuation and spelling are consistently good. You have ensured that procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are robust and firmly embedded, and that there is a shared responsibility among all leaders to ensure that high standards are maintained. Since the last inspection, overall attendance has improved noticeably and you have ensured that it remains similar to national averages at least.

The quality of teaching in mathematics has improved due to a new approach to how it is taught, which you introduced. It is evident from pupils' books, and during the lessons that I observed, that pupils are applying their basic arithmetical skills to more complex problems and reasoning activities very effectively. Pupils, especially the most able, are moved on to more challenging work when they are ready and are very rarely completing work that has little value. However, you agreed that this approach to teaching mathematics is a recent initiative and needs to be firmly embedded, not only in key stage 2, but in key stage 1 as well.

You and your leaders reacted quickly to the low reading outcomes in 2016 for key stage 2 pupils. The provision for reading has improved as a result, and standards are also improving. Nevertheless, you and your leaders fully acknowledge that, in some classes in key stage 2, pupils are completing learning activities that do not challenge them sufficiently or help them to develop higher-order reading skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture in the school. You and your leaders ensure that nothing is left to chance with regard to pupils' safety and well-being. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are well organised and accurate. Policies and procedures are firmly embedded. Staff receive appropriate training, including regular updates, and they have a good understanding of what processes to follow should they have any child protection or safeguarding concerns.

The pupils at your school are taught about safety in the curriculum. They feel safe and secure at school and the vast majority of parents agree that this is the case. Your parent support adviser supports parents, carers and pupils very effectively and works hard to ensure that their welfare and personal needs are addressed. Leaders work well with outside agencies and the local authority to safeguard pupils and keep them free from harm. The school quickly acts on unexplained absences or where a child's attendance is causing concern.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection I focused on what actions leaders have taken to:
 - address the decline in phonics outcomes in key stage 1
 - address the low outcomes in English grammar, punctuation and spelling in key stage 2
 - improve pupils' achievement in reading in key stage 2
 - ensure that the most able pupils in key stage 2 are being challenged in mathematics, including those disadvantaged pupils who are most able.
- The quality of provision for phonics is good. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 showed great enthusiasm in their individual groups in the lessons I observed, because the pace of learning was effective and their needs were appropriately met. Available performance information provided by your leaders shows that the proportion of pupils achieving the standard expected for their age has increased significantly.
- A scrutiny of pupils' work shows that pupils are using a range of grammar, punctuation and spelling very effectively in their written work. This is the case in different subjects such as history, geography and science, as well as in their English books. Along with an analysis of achievement information, there is strong evidence to show that pupils who are currently in the school are attaining higher standards in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- You and your leaders were quite rightly disappointed with the low reading outcomes in 2016 for pupils in key stage 2. As a result of this, the profile of reading has been raised in the school through the appointment of a reading champion, the purchase of additional reading resources and the creation of reading corners in each classroom. You have also looked closely at how reading is taught in key stage 2 and have made the necessary changes to improve provision. Although reading standards are improving as a result, you agreed with me that some learning activities are not challenging enough.
- Pupils who read to me said how much they enjoyed reading and that they get good opportunities to read in class. Less-able pupils use a range of techniques to help them read unfamiliar words. Most-able pupils read more challenging books with some fluency and expression, although, occasionally, they did have some difficulty interpreting the meaning of some words in the text.
- Over the course of the last two terms, a new approach to teaching mathematics in key stage 2 has been introduced. Pupils enjoy this new approach to learning, and evidence from pupils' books shows that they are making good progress. All pupils, including the most able, have good opportunities to consolidate their basic skills but quickly move on to more demanding problem-solving and investigation activities when they are ready. I thoroughly enjoyed observing a group of higher-ability pupils in Year 5 calculating missing angles from known facts. Their reasoning skills and ability to articulate their thoughts were quite impressive.
- The teaching of mathematics in key stage 2 is effective as a result of the way in which it is now taught. Pupils are being challenged appropriately, especially those

pupils who are most able, including those who are disadvantaged. However, this is a relatively recent initiative, and to maximise its impact you rightly agree that it needs to be firmly embedded across the whole school.

- Your and your leaders' concerted efforts to maintain attendance at an acceptable level have been successful. The member of staff responsible for pupils' attendance is tenacious in following up unexplained absences and works very effectively with families to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. As a result, overall attendance remains slightly above average and the attendance of those groups of pupils who are regularly absent is improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are given more opportunities to develop their higher-order reading skills
- recent strategies to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics are firmly embedded across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Chaffey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy head of school, the early years leader and subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met with seven members of the governing body and a local authority representative. I spoke with pupils informally during lunchtime and when listening to pupils read. I made short visits to every classroom with you and your deputy head of school and we looked at pupils' books. I scrutinised various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding documents and documents detailing your monitoring of teaching and learning. I considered the 46 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey, the 13 responses to the staff survey, the 31 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and 29 free-text responses to Parent View.