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Mrs Karen De Pietro  
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St John the Baptist Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School Pebmarsh  
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Dear Mrs De Pietro

### **Short inspection of St John the Baptist Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School Pebmarsh**

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Upon entering the school, I was impressed by the high-quality work on display in the corridor, the school hall and in every classroom. It is a vibrant, colourful place with a welcoming community atmosphere. Current pupils are very proud of their achievements, and showed me where their best pieces of work are displayed. They talked about how they had been challenged to achieve better quality written work. Consequently, the school environment is a true representation of its pupils.

Pupils, parents and staff are, in the main, effusive about the school, and most notably about you as the headteacher. They value how you seek the views of everyone before making a decision about change, and the improvements that you have quickly brought about. You are a highly visible leader, welcoming pupils at the front gate each morning, and a constant visitor to classrooms to look at pupils' learning. Parents and staff also appreciate the support that you give to many of them as individuals. You embody the school's community spirit, 'the Pebmarsh polish'.

My first key line of enquiry was to look at how you and governors have brought about sustained and systematic improvements to the school since you started in September 2015. When you first arrived, published past performance information showed that standards were not good enough. You set about addressing their concerns with rigour, diligence and a sense of real urgency. Consequently, now:

- governors are well trained and expertly holding leaders to account for the quality of provision in the school
- the early years outdoor areas are resourced and used well
- the curriculum has been reorganised to ensure that pupils receive balance and breadth to their curriculum
- mathematics, an area of considerable weakness prior to your arrival, is now taught with greater consistency across the school
- assessment systems are well embedded and used routinely to raise achievement
- performance management systems for staff are being used with rigour and holding staff to account for pupils' achievement
- after one year in post, in 2016, you and your team had successfully raised standards in the early years, phonics, key stage 1 and in writing and reading in key stage 2.

You have had a busy, but very successful start to your career as headteacher at St John the Baptist.

Pupils enjoy lessons and now say that they feel challenged. 'Challenge tasks' are used creatively by staff in all lessons to make pupils think about their work in a different or deeper way. Learning support assistants and teachers work seamlessly together to provide support for pupils so that lessons are well-crafted, creative and enjoyable experiences for pupils. Teaching, learning and assessment are helping most pupils to achieve more rapidly. However, you have identified that the most able pupils could be challenged further, especially in mathematics, to achieve the higher standards.

Governors have been proactive in becoming thorough and effective. They have undertaken extensive training on school improvement and have welcomed external support through the improvement board, supported by the local authority. Governors now visit the school with clear purpose and use a range of evidence to challenge leaders over the school's impact in raising pupils' achievement. Governors are passionate and knowledgeable about their roles, and are now expertly supporting leaders to give pupils the quality of provision that will help them to achieve well.

Admirably, you are improving achievement, while retaining the best of the school. You have retained and further developed the school's Christian values of 'love and FAITH' (friendship, appreciation, inclusion, trust and honesty). Your recent Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) in December 2016 also highlights this ethos as a strength in the school.

You work tirelessly to develop communication with parents, through the creation of the school website, weekly newsletter, 'book-bag' letters, and parents' evenings. This work ensures that the school remains a community for the pupils and parents alike.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Although leaders and governors do not recruit new staff often, they ensure that they keep up to date with the most recent guidance about safer recruitment. All statutory checks are completed on new staff. All documentation related to staff is proficiently maintained and governors routinely monitor this as part of their work.

Leaders use the most up-to-date guidance to train staff, including in the 'Prevent' duty. Staff make appropriate referrals to you, as the designated safeguarding leader. You use these referrals to seek the right advice and/or support from relevant external agencies. Although you record this information in pupils' case files, we did discuss ways that you could sharpen some of the recording of events, so that your deputy designated safeguarding leader could use the notes even more effectively.

Pupils feel safe at the school. They talked to me about how their lessons and assemblies teach them about a range of different ways to keep safe. Children in the early years could talk to me about road safety, while older pupils spoke about ways that they keep themselves safe while online. You are constantly reviewing the curriculum so that you can teach pupils, in an age-appropriate way, about how to keep themselves safe.

You ensure that you assess the risks of the different activities that pupils undertake. For example, you are an accredited Forest Schools provider, and all early years children and key stage 1 pupils access this, in line with their curriculum provision. You ensure that thorough risk assessments are in place for the range of activities available, including risk assessments for staff who transport pupils to the provision at a local farm.

You have worked hard to continue to ensure site safety, adding further secured gates and higher fencing around the early years provision. Your staff are vigilant while supervising during breaktimes and lunchtimes. Pupils are confident to report rare issues to staff where they feel that something might be unsafe, especially older pupils who watch out for the younger ones.

### **Inspection findings**

- The school improvement partners from both the local authority and the diocese have been instrumental in supporting you to raise standards at the school. They have been frequent visitors, offering advice, support and challenge to you, staff and governors. You have actively absorbed this advice and used it to transform the school's academic ethos quickly and sustainably.

- Prior to your arrival, there was no system by which staff were held accountable for their performance. You instantly put in place a rigorous appraisal process for all staff. You ensure that all staff targets are clearly linked to the urgent needs in the school. This system is now well embedded and is helping to raise standards. Equally, governors ensure that they hold you to account fully in your performance management. This aspect of leadership is now a strength in the school.
- You have introduced an assessment system into the school, and trained staff to use this effectively. You personally ensured that all assessment information that went into the new system was accurate and based on the evidence from pupils' work. You also ensured that staff met up with other school practitioners to moderate work, and to share ideas. Assessment is now a strength of the school. Staff and governors use this information to identify pupils who need more help, or who are falling behind, to help them catch up.
- We also looked at the other aspects of the curriculum, such as science, history, geography and music. Your use of topic work, trips and visits, and the Forest Schools provision, ensures that the curriculum remains varied and wide. For example, you use Essex Music Services to provide high-quality music lessons to all pupils, to secure good standards of provision that you cannot offer in-house currently. I particularly enjoyed watching your pupils engaging enthusiastically with their weekly drum lesson.
- You have appointed subject leaders to each curriculum area. There is a well-thought-out curriculum plan which is mapped across the key stages. This curriculum is enlivened by additional trips and visits. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 talked to me about their 'castles project' and recent visit to Hedingham Castle. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils could talk to me about Victorian living conditions, and the slum housing and hygiene, and how they had captured this in their extended writing pieces.
- However, you have identified that the formal assessment of pupils' progress in these subjects is not yet secure. Subject leaders are still developing in-house moderation of this curriculum, and working with other local primary and secondary schools to develop it.
- A key line of enquiry was to look at how the school is raising standards in mathematics, and grammar, punctuation and spelling. Although in 2016 there were signs of real improvement in the early years and key stage 1, standards in mathematics, and spelling, punctuation and grammar in key stage 2 remained too low.
- When you arrived, standards in mathematics were too low, and the teaching of mathematics was not facilitating good progress for pupils. You established a series of 'basics' such as a calculation policy, which you then continued to check on and embed across the school. Consequently, your tireless work has ensured that mathematics teaching is improving across the school, and pupils are making better progress.

- You have embedded a number of teaching strategies and interventions to enhance pupils' ability to use vocabulary, grammatical rules and punctuation with increasing complexity. You are also communicating with parents through events such as your 'reading evening' and 'spring challenge' to encourage them to support their children at home, especially with books and language from their own childhoods. This is starting to make a real difference to the quality of written and spoken language used by your pupils.
- However, you identify that although current pupils are making better progress now, this needs to be accelerated further if they are to close the gaps in their knowledge from previous years, and go on to attain the highest standards. This includes the most able pupils. Mathematics, and grammar, punctuation and spelling remain key areas for improvement in both your self-evaluation and the school development plan for 2016/17.
- The final line of enquiry was looking at how you support groups of pupils, such as pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. When you arrived at the school, there had not been a leader for special educational needs for a term. You appointed an experienced leader quickly, and have recently given her additional capacity to support this work further, as you identify it as an area for continued development.
- The skilful leader for special educational needs has worked quickly since her appointment to improve provision for these pupils. Pupils now have specialist support plans that give better emphasis to pupil and parent voice. The targets set for pupils reflect their needs, interests and aspirations. The leader uses insightful and measurable targets to ensure that pupils are getting high-quality classroom provision, and the right specialist support.
- However, leaders identify that their work with the local authority is still not ensuring that some pupils' needs are recognised quickly enough. Consequently, specialist support is not always timely to secure better provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The Parent Teacher Association is a proactive group whose members find creative and skilful ways to raise additional funds. You have used some of these funds to purchase additional equipment to help pupils to access mathematics in more interesting and varied ways. Governors have then sought evidence, through their visits, that this additional funding has been deployed effectively. As a result, you work collectively to help pupils achieve well.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further raise standards in mathematics, and grammar, punctuation and spelling, especially where pupils have gaps in their prior learning, to ensure that pupils make accelerated progress to achieve the highest standards

- continue to work with the local authority to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that these pupils get the correct, and timely, additional support and specialist provision, where required
- continue to support subject leaders to develop and embed thorough assessment procedures in foundation subjects, so that these are as secure as those in place in English and mathematics.

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

Kim Pigram  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the deputy headteacher, and four members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I also held telephone conversations with the school improvement partners from both the local authority and the diocese. I met with a member from the local family and schools together (FAST) team. You and I visited classrooms and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work while we were in some of those lessons. I spoke with pupils throughout the day, and met with a small group of pupils formally, where they brought their exercise books and we discussed what they had been learning. I also met with leaders from the early years, science and humanities, as well as the leader for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from 49 parents, as well as 12 staff responses and 17 pupil responses. I also looked at the school's own surveys of parents and carers, and pupils. I reviewed a range of school documentation, including information related to safeguarding and pupils' progress.