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Christopher Hollands
Head of School
St Mark's Church of England Primary School
Aylesbury Road
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Dear Mr Hollands

Short inspection of St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. St Mark's Church of England Primary converted to become an academy school in December 2014. When its predecessor school, St Mark's Church of England Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2014, it was judged to be good overall.

This school continues to be good.

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

Over time, the executive headteacher and school leaders have successfully raised standards in reading and mathematics across the school. Since your appointment as head of school in September 2017, you and the executive headteacher have evaluated accurately what still needs to be done and taken action to secure improvements. For instance, you are refining the school's assessment system to make it easier to track the progress and attainment of all groups of pupils.

Parents and carers are very positive about the care, guidance and support offered to their children. They are complimentary about the school's leadership. They said that they appreciate the harmony of this culturally diverse school community. They believe that the school's values are evident in all the school does. For example, one parent typically said, 'Children are happy and well-behaved; the children are well-prepared for life.'

Pupils enjoy belonging to St. Mark's school community. They appreciate the expectations that teachers place on them to work hard and be kind to others. They feel safe in school and confirmed that pupils behave well. Pupils know that, if they have a concern, there are adults in school who will help them to solve any problems. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted strongly. Leaders encourage respect and tolerance so that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. One pupil said, 'It [the school] helps us get ready for growing up.'

Pupils are polite and move around the school calmly. They listen carefully in class and share ideas readily with other pupils. They typically try hard to complete tasks, even when work is challenging. In one Reception class, children enjoyed sharing their holiday diaries with the teacher and spoke confidently about their holiday activities. The curriculum motivates pupils to appreciate and enjoy their learning. For example, pupils in Year 3 thoroughly enjoyed their first recorder lesson. They concentrated hard and played in time with the teacher.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, leaders, and the trust board ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. You ensure that all staff know and follow the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders with safeguarding responsibility keep all staff well informed through regular monthly safeguarding updates. Records are detailed. Any concern about the safety of pupils is followed up quickly and thoroughly. Staff receive training about current safeguarding practice, including the 'Prevent' duty, and how to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk from female genital mutilation.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school and know how to stay safe outside of school and on the internet. They know whom they can speak to if they have a problem and are confident that their concerns will be dealt with quickly. As one pupil said, 'School is a happy, safe place where we can learn and be ourselves.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed that the first key line of enquiry would be about how opportunities for pupils to write are planned and taught to ensure that they make good progress. In 2016, assessments showed that Year 6 pupils made stronger progress in reading and mathematics than in writing over key stage 2. In 2016, attainment at the end of Year 6 in writing was broadly in line with national averages. However, the most able pupils made less progress and attained less well in writing than the national average. Similarly, in 2016, at key stage 1, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in writing was slightly lower than the national average. As a result, you and your team introduced a number of writing projects across the school. For instance, pupils in Year 4 published a book of their written work as part of an art and writing project. Pupils told me how proud they are of their published stories.
- Outcomes for pupils in Year 6 in 2017 indicate that there has been some

improvement in pupils' writing. However, in September 2017, you and your team rightly introduced a further programme of support to accelerate these improvements. This involves further opportunities for pupils to work on improving their writing skills.

- You have a strong literacy team, which has a thorough knowledge of national standards in writing. The team ensures that all teachers are able to assess the progress and attainment of pupils' writing accurately. These assessments are shared across the school, and local schools and schools in the trust check their accuracy. Your literacy team has correctly identified the key areas of pupils' writing skills that need improvement, such as spelling. You and your literacy team are clearly committed to improving writing across the school still further.
- The second key line of enquiry focused on how you and your team have successfully challenged the most able disadvantaged children in the Reception Year and pupils in key stage 1. In 2016, no disadvantaged pupils achieved the higher standard in reading, writing or mathematics at key stage 1. You rightly prioritised this as an area of development last year. You have implemented a programme of support so that teachers can help these pupils to achieve the higher standard. This is beginning to show a positive impact on the progress that this group makes.
- The final key line of enquiry focused on pupils' attendance. While attendance rates for pupils overall are above the national average, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attend less often.
- You analyse attendance information and carefully check the reasons for absence. You have employed an attendance officer to offer support to identified groups. As a result, more pupils are attending regularly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' outcomes in writing are as strong as in reading and mathematics
- disadvantaged pupils, particularly the most able in Reception and key stage 1, are challenged to reach high standards in all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the Aquinas Trust Board, the director of education for the Diocese of Rochester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bromley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Frances Hawkes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the executive headteacher and other school leaders, including the leaders of literacy, early years and safeguarding. I held discussions with the Aquinas Trust chief executive officer, the academy improvement director and the chair of the educational scrutiny committee. I visited classes in key stage 1 and key stage 2, accompanied by you. I visited the early years, accompanied by the executive headteacher. I spoke to pupils in classes. Together with three members of the literacy team, I looked at pupils' writing books from 2016 and pupils' writing in other subjects. I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils and with a group of parents. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, documentation on the school's website, the school's self-evaluation and development plan, and current performance information.