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Mrs Christine Easton
Headteacher
St Mary's Island Church of England (Aided) Primary School
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Dear Mrs Easton

Short inspection of St Mary's Island Church of England (Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 March 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 have a clear vision for the school that promotes pupils' well-being and academic achievement. Strong Christian values permeate the school and, as one parent pointed out, 'the values are a strength of the school'. Your resolute conviction that 'only the best will do' for the pupils ensures that aspirations and expectations remain high.

Like you, governors are committed to further improvement and demonstrate a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, along with an understanding of the community it serves. Governors support you well by holding you firmly to account. Sensibly, they gather first-hand evidence in order to check the accuracy of the information you provide about pupils' progress and the school's wider development.

You successfully promote an ethos of mutual respect and consideration for others so that pupils learn in happy, calm and orderly surroundings. As a result, pupils take great pride in their work, and presentation in books is of a consistently high standard. Pupils talk about how much they enjoy school and value the support and help of staff. They recognise what the school provides to support them well. They talked enthusiastically, for example about the homework club and the Oasis room where they enjoy quiet time.

Positive relationships between adults and pupils give pupils confidence to talk about their learning and to challenge themselves further.

Children make a good start to their education in Reception Year, and successfully build upon this throughout key stage 1. At age seven, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard and greater depth remains steadfastly above the national average.

Parents and carers are happy with their children's education. Many parents commented on how approachable and friendly the staff are and how well staff know the children. For example, a parent spoke for many when she said, 'the headteacher does an exceptional job'. Another parent said, 'you can't fault what they do', when talking about what the school provides.

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, enjoy coming to school. The success of your work to ensure that every child attends well is evidenced by the reducing number of unauthorised absences.

The school's curriculum is a strength. Your passion to ensure that pupils' horizons are broadened is shared by governors and staff. Work with local educational providers allows pupils many inspiring opportunities, for example in science, design and technology, and art. Strong provision for sport ensures that pupils know how to keep themselves healthy. The quantity and quality of work in pupils' books demonstrate the importance given to all the subjects covered. Parents' comments included praise for the breadth of children's learning.

You ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well throughout the school, supported strongly by Christian values. Regular charity work gives pupils an understanding of alternative cultures. All members of the school community are equally valued, cared for and supported. A Year 5 girl explained that when she joined the school in Year 4, 'they made me feel included – I'm part of the class now'.

Following the previous inspection, you were asked to provide pupils with better opportunities to apply their writing and mathematical skills, and to promote pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils' overwhelmingly favourable attitudes to school, and their success in writing, clearly show your success in these areas. You are right to continue a keen focus on the teaching of mathematics, particularly in key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and accurate. The relevant recruitment checks are made, for example, and you are alert to wider issues of health and safety. This is exemplified by your skilful management of the current building work.

Pupils report that they feel safe. Pupils confirm that staff respond quickly to any worries they may have. Effective teaching ensures that pupils develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

Leaders ensure that all staff receive appropriate training, including in their duty to prevent extremism and radicalisation. Good-quality induction ensures that newly appointed staff are fully aware of their responsibilities. Staff know pupils very well and they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly.

The school seeks the support of other agencies when appropriate and is tenacious in ensuring that pupils receive the help they need.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including the effectiveness of safeguarding, the quality of teaching in mathematics in key stage 2, and links between teaching and pupils' progress generally in key stage 2.
- In 2017, the proportion of Year 6 pupils achieving the expected and higher standards in reading and mathematics dipped below the national average, comparing disappointingly with the typically stronger results in 2016. In writing, the pupils' above average attainment was sustained at the expected standard.
- Characteristically, this dip galvanised you into taking swift, effective action. The new approach to the teaching of mathematics, which you introduced, and a stricter approach to key stage 2 pupils' reading, shows positive effects which you are rightly working to consolidate.
- After recent changes, you recognise the need to support new middle leaders in successfully promoting continuing improvement, particularly in key stage 2. Staff changes also affected the progress of some pupils for a time. You are wisely ensuring that, where necessary, pupils are successfully supported to make rapid progress and catch up.
- In key stage 2, pupils' progress in mathematics is improving. The new approach to the teaching of mathematics has brought valuable opportunities for pupils to tackle increasingly complex mathematical problems. Intensive staff training has equipped teachers to accurately identify and address gaps in pupils' understanding that might otherwise hold back their success.
- Leaders looked closely to find the reasons for the dip in key stage 2 pupils' outcomes last year. Well-considered improvements to teaching, particularly in reading and mathematics, are ensuring rapid improvements in current pupils' progress. These developments are also successfully supporting pupils who need to catch up after the recent period of staff changes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching in key stage 2 continues to focus successfully on promoting good progress in mathematics and on enabling pupils who may need to catch up after recent staff changes, to do so
- middle leaders' work clearly maintains and further develops good teaching, particularly in key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Frances Nation
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we visited classrooms together and talked to pupils about their work. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I met with pupils from key stage 1 and key stage 2 and heard them read. I looked at a wide range of pupils' work with middle leaders. I met with two members of the governing body and held telephone conversations with the chair of the governing body and one other governor. I met with a representative of the local authority. I considered 39 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, 106 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and 74 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as speaking with a number of parents.