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Mrs Rebecca Williams  
Headteacher  
St Thomas' Church of England Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Williams

### **Short inspection of St Thomas' Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 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 February 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 established a positive culture and ethos in the school. Staff work hard and benefit from learning from each other and teachers in other local schools. For example, collaborative work with schools and the local authority has improved teachers' subject knowledge and the clarity of their instructions to pupils. This has given teachers more confidence to challenge pupils in their learning. The quality of teaching and the outcomes for pupils, especially in key stage 2, have improved.

Relationships are polite, trusting, professional and warm. This gives the school a welcoming and friendly feel. Most parents and carers are extremely positive about the school. Their views can be summed by one parent's comment: 'This a brilliant school where children learn, are looked after and prepared for the next stage of their academic journey.' Equally resounding praise comes from the pupils, as summed up by this comment: 'All the teachers are nice. It is a welcoming school and extra help is always at hand.'

You make sure that pupils benefit from a varied and interesting curriculum. At the time of my visit, the whole school were thoroughly enjoying a theatre production about the Victorians. The pupils who spoke to me clearly demonstrated a mature understanding of respect for others and about diversity in modern Britain. You, your colleagues and governors have a good understanding of the strengths

and areas for improvement in the school. After the previous inspection, you were asked to further improve the quality of teaching and learning by improving teachers' questioning skills and the quality of subject leadership. Teachers plan work according to pupils' needs, using assessment information to identify gaps in pupils' learning, which are quickly addressed. Teachers ask questions which make pupils think hard and reflect on their learning. Work in pupils' books shows that they are challenged to improve the quality of their writing. For example, in English, the application of more complex punctuation in the Year 5 and 6 books enhances the quality of the pupils' writing.

By the end of Year 6, pupils' progress measures in reading, writing and mathematics indicate that the quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection. The provisional key stage 2 outcomes in 2018 were a marked improvement on those of 2017. Nonetheless, we were in agreement that there is still work to do in order to improve outcomes in the early years and in the teaching of phonics.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school has secure procedures for checking on pupils' safety and welfare. You showed me documentation demonstrating effective record-keeping and the work that you do with parents and external agencies to protect pupils from harm. Staff are trained to identify any problems that pupils may face. They are alert to any signs that pupils may not be safe.

The pupils who spoke to me said that they feel entirely safe in school. They said that bullying was rare and they know how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils told me that St Thomas' is a 'safe school' where they learned about 'fire safety, online safety and cyber bullying'. Pupils said that behaviour was 'mostly good' and they were adamant that bullying of any type was 'rare'.

### **Inspection findings**

- The first line of enquiry was to explore why, in recent years, a smaller proportion of pupils attained the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 1 and Year 2 than is found nationally. You and other leaders talked to me about the new scheme of work that has been introduced. Inspection evidence indicates that this new approach is beginning to make a positive difference. However, there is still work to do to embed these changes in the teaching of phonics to ensure that Year 1 pupils achieve as well as they should.
- The next line of enquiry was to explore the decline in the proportion of children who leave early years attaining a good level of development. The early years is a purposeful environment where the children have good access to a range of activities indoors and outdoors. Children play well together, cooperate and are curious to find out something new. Nevertheless, some children are not making strong enough gains in their learning. This is mostly due to an increasing proportion of children who have speech and language difficulties. Although a

range of interventions are in place to support children in their communication skills, it is too soon to be able to evaluate the impact of this work on children's progress.

- My final line of enquiry focused on how governors ensure that the pupil premium grant has a positive impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders make effective use of the additional funding to support pupils who are identified as disadvantaged. Governors know how much funding is available and they can articulate how the money is spent to benefit individual pupils. Disadvantaged pupils' strong progress was evident in the learning that we observed and in the scrutiny of their work. This is due to the effective provision that they receive.
- At the start of the inspection, some of the policies on the website were out of date. Similarly, some of the information that all schools must publish was either out of date or missing. This included a safeguarding policy that reflects the September 2018 changes and the report on how leaders spend external funds for sport and physical education. In practice, leaders spend the sport and PE premium well. By the end of the inspection you had made sure that both these documents were uploaded to the website and ready for governors' approval.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to build on recent changes to the teaching of phonics to enable Year 1 pupils to reach the expected standard.
- children with speech and language difficulties are helped to catch-up quickly so that they can make the progress of which they are capable by the end of their time in early years.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daley  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and your assistant headteacher, subject leaders, the administrative assistant and five members of the governing body. Together, we observed learning in classrooms. To analyse the impact of teaching, I looked through a sample of pupils' work throughout the school.

I looked through a range of documents prior to and during the inspection, such as policies, information about safeguarding, and the school's assessment information.

To gather pupils' views I met with a group of 12 key stage 2 pupils. In addition, 30 parents responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent survey, and I also considered their written comments about the school.