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Mrs Joanne Embley-Peers
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Embley-Peers

Short inspection of Mellor St Mary Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2019, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

There have been significant changes at the school over the last two years. You have been appointed to the headship and a new deputy headteacher is now in post. There is also a new chair of the governing body. During this period, you have reorganised the teaching arrangements and there are now five mixed-age rather than seven single-age classes. Most class teachers were not at the school at the time of the previous inspection. You and other leaders have worked effectively during this period to maintain standards and develop the staff team. Staff feel well supported and enjoy working at the school. You and other leaders have an accurate and balanced view of the school's effectiveness.

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to further improve teaching, particularly for the most able. There is evidence that your work in this area has had a positive impact. Over the past two years, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has been well above the national average.

Members of the governing body have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Over the past two years, governors have worked closely with the local authority to improve their understanding of the school's work and the standards pupils achieve. As a result, governors are now more knowledgeable about

the school and regularly use their increased expertise to ask you and other leaders pertinent and challenging questions.

Pupils enjoy school. They behave extremely well and work hard in lessons. They are respectful towards each other and the adults who teach them. Pupils wear their school uniform with pride and are rarely absent. Their experience of school is enriched by a range of sports clubs, musical events and residential visits. The pupils I spoke with said that they feel safe in school and that they are looked after well. They said that bullying rarely happens and staff would soon sort things out if it did.

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. This is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive responses to the questions on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Parents say that staff are welcoming and approachable. A typical comment on Parent View was, 'We are so happy with the well-being and progress of our children at the school. Every member of staff is approachable and dependable.' Another comment was, 'Our son loves going to school and often asks if he can go to school at the weekend or during the holidays!'

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have created a safe and nurturing place for pupils to learn. The leadership team has a good knowledge of the school community and this helps to ensure that pupils are well looked after and well supported. Safeguarding policies and procedures are well established and meet current requirements and are fit for purpose. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training. Regular '7-minute briefings' help to keep staff informed about any changes or updates to the school's safeguarding arrangements. Leaders with specific safeguarding responsibilities work closely with outside agencies where necessary to support pupils and their families.

Pupils spoken with during this inspection said that they feel safe in school. They had a good understanding about e-safety and how to respond if they had any concerns about what they experience while using the internet. All of the parents who responded to Parent View said that their children feel safe at school and that they are looked after well.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has been well above the national average over the past three years. However, you recognise that pupils are capable of even higher standards and that progress in reading, writing and mathematics could be even better than it is currently.
- At the start of the inspection, we agreed that the first key line of enquiry would be pupils' progress in mathematics. I saw evidence in books that staff teach pupils a broad range of mathematical topics. Teachers sequence their teaching to ensure that pupils develop fluency in calculation. I saw children in the Reception class working confidently to add and subtract numbers up to 20. I also saw pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 accurately calculating multiplication problems. However,

pupils are not routinely challenged to use and apply their mathematical skills and knowledge to investigate and solve problems. I saw little evidence in books of pupils being challenged to develop their mathematical reasoning skills and this limits pupils' overall progress in this subject.

- The second key line of enquiry on which I focused was reading. I found that reading is a significant strength at Mellor St Mary's. Phonics teaching is highly effective. Over recent years, almost all pupils have passed the national phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. Staff provide good support for those pupils who struggle with reading. As a result, by the time pupils move into key stage 2 most are at or above the expected standard for their age in reading. You and other leaders have raised the profile of reading across the school. The school library has been developed and pupils now have access to a wider range of high-quality reading material. Many of the older pupils with whom I met were avid readers and demonstrated a very good knowledge of children's authors. In 2018, over half of the Year 6 cohort achieved the higher standard in reading at the end of key stage 2.
- I also found strengths in the teaching of writing. Pupils regularly write for different purposes and many older pupils regularly produce high-quality written work. In one of the lessons I visited, pupils were writing a diary entry from the perspective of Oliver Twist, having recently seen a drama production of this story. Pupils' work was well written and reflected a good awareness of grammatical structure. They explained to me how using a rhetorical question added detail and enhanced the quality of their work. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in writing was twice the national average in 2018.
- My final line of enquiry was pupils' progress in the wider curriculum. There are many strengths in subjects such as music and art at Mellor St Mary's. However, the progress pupils make in geography, history and science is variable. In some classes, teaching is effective and strong progress was evident in the work pupils produce. I saw many examples of pupils taking care to record the results of a science experiment using graphs and charts. However, in some classes pupils' progress is limited by teachers' weak subject knowledge and low expectations of what pupils can achieve in these subjects. Too often, teachers accept work which contains conceptual errors and as a result, pupils fail to move forward in their learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers enhance pupils' ability to solve problems and develop their reasoning skills in mathematics
- regular checks are made on the quality of pupils' work in all subjects and any weaknesses are addressed swiftly and effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Blackburn, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, who is the subject leader for mathematics and English. I met with four members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with staff and pupils. I visited all classrooms, with you, to observe teaching and learning and spent time looking at the quality of work in pupils' books. I listened to pupils from Year 3 and Year 6 read. I also spoke with a group of Year 6 pupils about various aspects of school life. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and dinner time. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, the school's development plan and minutes from governing body meetings. I also took account of the staff questionnaire and the 64 responses to Parent View.