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Mrs Bridget Harrison
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Harrison

Short inspection of The Rackham Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since September 2017, when you joined the school, you have acted decisively and made substantial improvements. Upon your arrival, you thoroughly and accurately evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You judged that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment needed to be better. With the support of local opportunities outside the school, such as the Fenlands and East Cambridge opportunity area project, you and your leaders introduced well-considered and effective staff training. Staff wholeheartedly support you and share your determination to improve. The desired improvements are evident. Many parents spoke highly of the many positive changes you are making at the school. One parent summarised a widely held view among parents: 'Rackham is a brilliant school!' The overwhelming majority of parents reported on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, that they would recommend the school to other parents and carers.

Leaders have made good progress in resolving the areas for improvement outlined in the previous inspection report. Pupils now are confident writers who capably write extended pieces of work. In contrast with 2016, when the progress of key stage 2 pupils was below the national average in writing, pupils' progress in 2018 was in line with the national average. Similarly, in 2018, the proportions of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils achieving the expected standard in writing were above the national average.

Governors set high expectations for staff and pupils and play a positive role in the improvement of the school. In response to a full review of governance in 2018, governors changed aspects of their work so that they are now better informed about the quality of education. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and hold leaders accountable to ensure weaker areas improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements and are applied consistently. Leaders make sure staff and governors are properly trained and are up to date with local and national safeguarding issues. All adults are vigilant for the signs of potential harm and report concerns appropriately as they arise. You keep meticulous records of the actions of the agencies working with vulnerable pupils. These records demonstrate that pupils receive the support they need.

Leaders carry out all the required checks to ensure that adults working with pupils are suitable. Governors and local authority representatives diligently check these records to ensure that leaders and staff carry out their duties effectively.

Inspection findings

- We agreed that my first line of enquiry would be to consider how effective leaders' actions have been in improving the quality of behaviour at the school. We did so because the most recent published information shows the rate of fixed-term exclusions to be above the national average for similar schools.
- On your arrival at the school, you and governors introduced a new school ethos and values. Inspection evidence shows that these are very well embedded. Pupils live up to the very high expectations set for their behaviour in lessons, on the playground and when moving around the school. Pupils demonstrate kindness and consideration for others. Every pupil I spoke with told me that pupils are well behaved at the school. The majority of parents on Parent View agreed that the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved.
- This term, you also introduced a new behaviour policy as part of your drive to bring about further improvement. Pupils understand how the behaviour policy works and told me that it helps them manage their behaviour. Pupils also told me that teachers manage the rare incidents of unacceptable behaviour very well. Inspection evidence confirms pupils' views. School records show marked improvements in the quality of behaviour of pupils highlighted as struggling with their social, emotional and mental health needs. As a result, the incidence of unacceptable behaviour and behaviour leading to exclusions is going down.
- My second line of enquiry was to determine how well leaders' actions are improving the provision for the most able pupils. In English, pupils are accomplished readers because of teachers' high expectations. Teachers challenge pupils to read sophisticated texts and pupils eagerly reach for difficult work. As a

result, in 2018, over half of Year 6 pupils achieved the higher standard in reading, nearly twice the national average.

- In other subjects, teachers' expectations of potential high achievers are not always as high as in reading. For example, teachers' questioning sometimes promotes pupils' deeper thinking, but at other times, teachers' questions are too simple. When teachers ask questions that extend pupils' understanding of their learning, the most able pupils, along with those around them, make very strong progress.
- Teachers sometimes do not provide the most able pupils with opportunities to take their next steps in learning. During our lesson observations, we saw some pupils completing easy tasks quickly. Teachers were not always quick to respond with more difficult work. Work in books confirms that, at times, some pupils spend too much time completing learning tasks that are too easy.
- My third line of enquiry was to consider the actions leaders are taking to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics. Although substantially higher than in 2016, the proportion of Year 6 pupils that reached the expected standard in mathematics was just below the national average in 2018.
- Some teachers are making good use of the knowledge and techniques gained from recent training to plan learning that is leading to pupils making good progress. However, this is not as commonplace as you need it to be. These new approaches when used by teachers are starting to have a positive effect. You and I saw in pupils' books and during lesson observations that these approaches are not yet consistently used by all teachers.
- Pupils calculate numbers very well and have a firm grasp of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They think through their work carefully and find correct answers to tricky calculations.
- Teachers are improving the way they develop pupils' reasoning and problem solving. In classes where leaders' chosen approach is adopted fully, pupils discuss challenging mathematical concepts very capably. Where this is the case, pupils solve real-world mathematical problems and show sophisticated reasoning skills.
- My final line of enquiry was to consider how effective the provision is in ensuring disadvantaged pupils do well at school. Because the number of these pupils at the school is small, it is not possible to draw conclusions from published results. The school development plan, however, rightly places great importance on improving the support provided for disadvantaged pupils to ensure positive life chances for them. In the last academic year, you commissioned a review of leaders' use of the pupil premium grant. In response to the findings of the review, you began to plan and evaluate provision for disadvantaged pupils more effectively.
- Leaders have high aspirations for disadvantaged pupils and have taken part in regional projects to ensure they provide them with the best support. Working with specialist educators and research organisations, leaders have created effective strategies to improve the literacy of disadvantaged pupils. These strategies are starting to take effect.
- The school's accurate assessment information shows that many more disadvantaged pupils are making good progress and reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Nonetheless, in reading, writing

and mathematics, results for disadvantaged pupils are varied. Some pupils are doing very well, while others less so. Leaders' support for those doing less well has not yet led to most disadvantaged pupils making the progress that they should.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff have the highest expectations of the most able pupils and provide learning opportunities that ensure these pupils make the progress they should
- all teachers implement the chosen approaches to teaching mathematics, so that pupils develop greater skills of reasoning and problem solving
- well-considered support for disadvantaged pupils is consistently in place, so that they all achieve well.

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

Yours sincerely

Al Mistrano
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, other members of the leadership team, members of the governing body, staff, pupils and parents. We observed learning and teaching in all year groups. With you and other members of your leadership team, I scrutinised pupils' work in English, mathematics and science. I observed the behaviour of pupils in lessons, at lunchtime and while moving around the school.

I looked at a range of documents, including the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, a sample of documentation regarding the provision for disadvantaged pupils, behaviour incident logs, leaders' self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.

I considered the 140 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, along with responses to the school's staff questionnaire and pupil survey.