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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Heather Brand
Executive Headteacher
Gillingham St Michael's Church of England Primary School
The Boundaries
Geldeston Road
Gillingham
Beccles
Suffolk
NR34 0HT

Dear Mrs Brand

Short inspection of Gillingham St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school has gone through a number of changes since the previous inspection. First, the school entered into an informal partnership with another local school, Ditchingham Church of England Primary Academy. The school then became an academy itself, sponsored by the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT). The partnership between the two schools was then formalised and you are now the executive headteacher of what is known as the Kingfisher Partnership. The partnership's leadership capacity has been strengthened by the appointment of a head of school on each site.

The school building has also changed since the previous inspection. The school has grown from two to three classes. An additional classroom was built to accommodate this. A new library was built at the same time. The classrooms and communal areas are bright and attractive, providing a good-quality learning environment.

Gillingham St Michael's is a welcoming and friendly school, with happy pupils and staff. The school's very small size means that everybody knows everybody, and pupils like this family feel. This also means that staff know pupils well as individuals. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong. This helps to ensure that

classrooms are happy and productive places where pupils behave well and try hard.

You are supported and challenged well by the multi-academy trust (DNEAT). You work closely with the executive principal for the region that the partnership is part of. She knows the school well and has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. You and the rest of the staff are supported in a range of ways by the multi-academy trust. The trust offers a wide range of professional development opportunities such as courses, meetings and workshops. Challenge is regular and effective. For example, the termly review meeting, involving school and trust leaders as well as governors, focuses well on ensuring that expectations are high and that the school continues to improve.

Governance is strong. The chair of the governing body is a national leader of governance and her experience and expertise are clear. Other governors have a range of skills and experience, enabling the governing body to fulfil its functions well. Governors also work closely with the multi-academy trust, and with the executive principal in particular. This helps them to have a clear and accurate view about the school's strengths and weaknesses, and to hold you to account fully.

Leaders, governors and the multi-academy trust all agree on the school's current priorities for further improvement. While good progress has been made in improving outcomes in reading, you know that there is still work to do in this area.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe at Gillingham St Michael's. Their strong relationships with staff mean that there is always someone to talk to if they are worried about anything. Pupils say that there is little bullying and that staff sort problems out when they do occur.

You have ensured that strong systems are in place so that only suitable people are employed to work with children. The school's single central record of pre-employment checks is particularly well kept, reflecting the school's methodical approach. You have also ensured that staff are vigilant in noticing and reporting possible signs of abuse and neglect. The school's designated safeguarding leads have been fully trained to carry out this vital role effectively.

Inspection findings

- I followed a number of lines of enquiry to check whether the school remains good. First, I looked at how well reading is taught and whether current pupils are making good progress in this area. I chose to look at reading because results of the 2017 national tests showed that pupils' progress, between Year 2 and Year 6, was among the lowest in the country.
- There were 14 pupils in last year's Year 6. Although this was a much bigger cohort than is typical for the school, it remains a very small group of pupils. This means caution is required when considering the published data as the result for each individual pupil has a disproportionate impact on the result for the group as a whole.

- We talked about the results of the Year 6 national tests in reading and we discussed the reasons why some pupils did not do as well as they should have done. Some of the pupils struggled with the demands of the tests themselves and did not manage to complete the test papers to the best of their ability in the time allowed. Some pupils found working under test conditions challenging and did not have sufficient resilience to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding fully. A very small number of pupils did not make good progress between key stage 1 and key stage 2 for very valid reasons.
- You recognised, before the national tests took place, that the teaching of reading was weaker than that of other subjects. You and the head of school took prompt and decisive action to improve outcomes in reading. For example, a daily 30-minute reading slot has been introduced in each classroom. This is used in a variety of ways, including to allow teachers to share good-quality texts with their classes.
- You have found that these actions have already had a positive impact on encouraging pupils to develop a love of books. Pupils told me how much they enjoy reading and visiting the library. You have also ensured that teachers focus more closely on developing pupils' comprehension skills. Pupils already have good word recognition skills because phonics is taught well. Comprehension skills, such as inference and deduction, are now being taught more explicitly and pupils are making better progress in reading as a result.
- The second area that I checked was whether pupils make good progress in mathematics. Similarly, I chose to look at this because results of the key stage 2 national tests were below average in this subject. The same issues with taking the national tests applied in mathematics as well as reading.
- You have made a number of improvements to the teaching of mathematics and these are already having an effect on the progress pupils make. You have introduced a 'mastery' approach, where pupils develop a deep understanding of each element of the mathematics curriculum, and you have found that this is working well. This was demonstrated clearly in the youngest class where we saw Year 2 pupils competently solving simple algebraic problems independently.
- The final area that I checked was the school's approach to assessment and whether the assessments made are accurate. I chose to look at this because of the differences in outcomes between subjects in the school's published data. That is, in 2017 pupils appeared to do better in subjects where tests were marked internally (by teachers in school) than those that were marked externally.
- You have ensured that the school's approach to assessment is thorough and consistent. You and your staff work closely with the multi-academy trust to ensure that the judgements teachers make are similar to those made in other schools. The accuracy of your assessments has also been checked and confirmed by the local authority.
- It is clear that some pupils struggled with the formal nature of the national tests. Some pupils did not work quickly enough to complete the papers in the time allowed. As a result, they did not score as highly on the tests as they should have done. Although it is for the school to decide how, and to what extent, pupils are

prepared to sit the national tests, we agreed that it would be beneficial for pupils to have a better idea of how to approach formal assessments in future.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the quality of teaching of reading so that a greater proportion of pupils make rapid progress
- pupils develop the resilience and speed of response necessary for them to demonstrate their skills fully in formal assessments.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the executive principal and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Norwich, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the head of school, the executive principal and two governors. I also met with the chief executive and the improvement director of the multi-academy trust. I listened to pupils read and talked to them about their books. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils during the day. I took into account the 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the eight free-text comments that were received. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you, throughout the school. I looked at school documents including the single central record of pre-employment checks.