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Mrs Helen Bath
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Dear Mrs Bath

Short inspection of St Mark's Ecumenical Anglican/Methodist Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2013.

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 developed a skilled and experienced team of leaders and, together, you share a detailed and accurate picture of the school's effectiveness. You have gained the confidence of staff through your assured and professional leadership. As a team, you and your staff demonstrate the school's commitment to sharing good practice so that pupils have the best possible teaching. You work effectively with skilled governors to plan and achieve improvements to the curriculum, to teaching, and to pupils' progress. As a result of these improvements, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level, in 2018, was above the national average at both key stages in reading, writing and mathematics.

Through effective professional development, you have established strengths in the teaching of phonics, reading and mathematics. You and your leadership team hold detailed discussions with teachers, which guide them on how to promote the progress of individual pupils. Since the school became an academy, you have joined the Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust, engaging wholeheartedly with what the trust is able to offer. The effective working partnership between the trust advisers, governors, school leaders and staff secures the school's strong capacity to continue to improve.

Pupils are diligent in their work and proud of their school. Their well-presented work shows that they are gaining skills of concentrating and doing their best. Pupils work

particularly well together and share ideas respectfully with their classmates. The curriculum is well planned. Learning is set in meaningful contexts in which pupils are enthused by 'Wow' moments planned for every topic. For example, the project on the Vikings in Year 4 involved studying 'Beowulf' and taking part in an exciting Viking experience day. The vast majority of parents are positive about the wide range of learning experiences provided for their children. A parent typically expressed this by saying, 'The school teaches important core values as well as a variety of topics to cover the curriculum, making learning fun and interesting for the children.'

As leaders you have developed particular strengths in sports and are rightly proud of the School Games Gold Award. Events in school, such as those associated with the Space Education Quality Mark, develop pupils' enthusiasm for science. However, while teachers build pupils' learning well in most aspects of science, reviews of pupils' work showed that the science curriculum for key stage 2 is not fully developing pupils' understanding of how to work scientifically.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All recruitment checks are carried out and recorded appropriately. Staff receive effective training and the school responds swiftly to concerns that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Leaders work closely with agencies that offer support for families and maintain contact to ensure that the support is effective. The school's work with young carers is of a high standard and much valued by parents and pupils. Governors support leaders with safeguarding and health and safety through regular meetings and reviews. Risk assessments are in place for particular school activities, for example keeping a school dog.

Pupils feel safe in school. Pupils new to the school, and their parents, value the warm welcome they receive. Almost all parents spoken to or who responded to the online survey, Parent View, also feel their children are safe. A number of parents were not positive about the school's response to concerns they raise, for example about instances of possible bullying. Pupils say that behaviour in the school is good and, in fact, 'off the scale' as one pupil described it. Should they have a concern, pupils say they have trusted adults, including the family support adviser, to help them. However, some pupils feel that on occasions girls, in particular, fall out with friends. Leaders meet promptly with parents and pupils when concerns are raised. All meetings are fully recorded. Staff give pupils good strategies and support to improve their friendships. Records show that actions taken in response to concerns are in line with the school's policy and are checked promptly for their effectiveness.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry for the inspection was to determine whether recent improvements to pupils' progress in reading are being sustained. Following a period where progress was weaker, leaders identified a need to bring about improvements to teaching and the curriculum. The innovative development of the

curriculum and the teaching of reading has been wide-ranging and strongly led. Pupils are enthused by new ways of learning and by the extensive stock of high-quality literature that is available in their well-organised book areas.

- Teachers place a high priority on developing pupils' understanding of what they read. Pupils' work shows that the skills of understanding complex vocabulary and summarising texts are built up across key stage 2. Additionally, teachers guide and track pupils' personal reading to ensure that pupils read regularly and widely. Discussions about class books are structured to support pupils in deepening their understanding. For example, after reading a shared passage of their book, 'Floodland', pupils in Year 6 were encouraged to say what they liked, disliked or what puzzled them. Pupils were articulate in explaining the questions raised by the passage. Inspection activities showed that these skills were taught equally well in other year groups.
- I next reviewed the actions that the school is taking to ensure that the most able pupils achieve their potential in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. Leaders have identified this as a school priority. Their reviews show that, for some pupils, mathematics is the subject in which they are less likely to deepen their learning. To address this issue leaders have provided teachers with well-planned professional development on how to challenge pupils' thinking in mathematics. Visits to classrooms and pupils' workbooks show that pupils work confidently and independently in mathematics. Their skills of calculation and numerical fluency have been developed well. Pupils set their work out neatly to better support accuracy and self-checking. Leaders are continuing with professional development for teachers so that there is consistency in teaching pupils how to accurately explain their reasoning.
- Lastly, I reviewed the teaching of writing in early years and key stage 1. In recent years, the attainment of boys in writing at the end of the Reception Year has been much lower than that of girls. A very high proportion of both boys and girls have reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, leaders have rightly identified that this does not always translate into high attainment for boys in writing at the end of key stage 1. Boys' writing in the current Reception class shows that some have weak development of pencil skills when they start school. Although they make progress, for some boys, this progress is not moving them on quickly enough towards the expected standard. A number are still hampered by inaccurate letter formation, which slows their writing. Although they have regular opportunities to practise their writing, both through play and in guided teaching, their progress is not sufficient to help them catch up.
- Samples of pupils' writing show many of those boys who did not reach the expected level in writing at the end of the Reception Year continue to have weak handwriting and sentence construction in key stage 1. Leaders have responded to this problem by giving teachers guidance on how to match teaching more closely to the needs of pupils who need to catch up. This is a recent initiative, but, where it is being used well, it is effective in supporting pupils to translate their ideas into simple, clear sentences. The new methods of teaching are not yet used consistently. Leaders recognise the need to provide further guidance for

teachers in order to secure pupils' achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of writing in the early years and key stage 1 secures the good achievement of all pupils, particularly those boys who need to catch up to the expected level for their age
- they develop the curriculum for science further to give pupils in key stage 2 a fuller understanding of working scientifically.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Marriott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you and your senior leadership team. Together we visited classrooms to talk to pupils about their learning. I took account of the school's latest assessments of pupils' achievement and reviewed samples of pupils' work in reading, writing, mathematics and science. I held a meeting with a group of governors. I also met with a representative of the Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and the school development plan. I held discussions about safeguarding and met with the family support adviser. I reviewed the school's procedures and documentation for supporting behaviour, safeguarding and health and safety. I held a meeting with a group of pupils to take account of their views of the school. I spoke with other pupils at lunchtime and in their lessons. I took account of the 48 responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and held a meeting with one parent. I took account of the 113 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and reviewed the 78 comments. I considered the views of staff through the 17 responses to the online staff survey.