

21 January 2019

Mr Daniel Holden  
Headteacher  
Earl Sterndale Church of England Primary School  
Earl Sterndale  
Buxton  
Derbyshire  
SK17 0BS

Dear Mr Holden

### **Short inspection of Earl Sterndale Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 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 May 2015.

#### **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 built upon the strengths identified at the previous inspection and worked with your school community to achieve further improvements.

There is a positive culture built around a vision of learning that is 'meaningful, challenging and inclusive'. Your expectations of staff and pupils are high and you have worked effectively to address the school's priorities for improvement.

The school is extremely popular within the community. All parents and carers that responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to others. A large proportion of parents and grandparents told the inspector that they particularly valued the 'family feel' of the school. They said they appreciated the 'tremendous care, guidance and support' that they and their child receive.

You have developed a broad and rich curriculum. Pupils benefit from numerous opportunities to learn within the impressive local landscape. They routinely take part in outdoor pursuits, including climbing, walking and canoeing. Music is a particularly strong feature of pupils' learning. Many parents were keen to praise the recent nativity concert that had included all pupils and an entire herd of 'tap dancing donkeys'.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified deficiencies in the learning environment. Considerable changes have taken place. A new classroom has been built. Class 1 now has a purpose-built early years/key stage 1 learning area. Pupils' work is displayed with care, and great effort is taken to stimulate pupils' interests and celebrate their achievements. The outdoor provision for children in the early years, although improved, still has shortcomings. Leaders have plans in place to address these and extensive fund-raising activities have commenced.

Ensuring that pupils are taught to write neatly with correct grammar, punctuation and spelling was also an area to improve from the previous inspection. Work in current pupils' books and evidence seen in lessons indicate that the teaching of grammar has improved. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 have a good grasp of how to use correct grammar to improve the precision of their writing. They are familiar with, and use well, the correct grammatical terms. Pupils' spelling is improving but rightly remains a focus. Although there are signs of improvement, the presentation of some pupils' work is not as careful as it should be, and this includes the work of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Ensuring that the work for all pupils is not too easy or too hard was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Work in pupils' books, evidence from lesson observations and individual pupils' achievement information indicate that progress has been made. Teachers, in the main, successfully plan the learning for a range of ages and a wide variety of abilities. Care is taken to ensure that learning resources engage pupils' interests and are of high quality. Many pupils make strong progress, including pupils with SEND. However, some inconsistencies remain in the provision of regular opportunities for the most able pupils to apply their learning, deepen their understanding and have their thinking challenged across a range of subjects.

Finally, the previous inspection highlighted the need for leaders to extend the monitoring of the quality of teaching to include a review of pupils' work. You have been creative and have fostered strong partnerships with a local cluster of small schools. You now take part in joint school improvement, including the monitoring of the quality of teaching. These partnerships are building a broader approach to quality assurance and to staff training. Rightly, you are developing partnerships to further improve the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a palpable school ethos of care, support and guidance. Pupils told me how happy and safe they feel. They are effusive about their school, and the positive care and guidance they receive. They said that bullying was extremely rare and that any 'falling out' was quickly resolved by school staff.

All staff, and the governing body, are well trained and kept up to date about safeguarding matters. Procedures for reporting any concerns are well understood and action is taken in a timely manner. Pupils told me that they could speak to any

adult within the school if they had a problem or a concern. They said that they felt confident that any issues they may have would be swiftly and effectively resolved.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe inside school and outside in the community. They particularly appreciate learning about a variety of topics in assemblies, including from visitors to the school. The recent work on 'making positive decisions' caused much debate, including with teachers and leaders. Older pupils said that they valued these conversations highly as they helped them to 'really think'. Local safeguarding issues are addressed including farm, quarry and water safety. Pupils are kept well informed about broader issues including online safety and exploitation.

The business manager ensures that record keeping is systematic, and information is stored securely. Appropriate checks are made on staff and visitors. The maintenance of the single central record of recruitment, including governors, is exemplary.

### **Inspection findings**

- The number of pupils in each year group is too small to make comparisons with national figures. However, work in pupils' books and the information that leaders collect about each pupil's achievement indicate that pupils' progress is improving in English and mathematics, particularly in key stage 2. Although good progress is made across a range of subjects, evidence in books shows it is not as strong in non-core subjects as it is in English and mathematics.
- A large proportion of pupils enter the school at unusual points in the school year. Many are pupils with SEND. Leaders ensure that these pupils successfully integrate into the school community and settle quickly. Consequently, they make rapid and sustained progress. Parents and pupils are vocal in their appreciation.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are a skilled group, ambitious to ensure that Earl Sterndale remains a good school that serves its community well. Their successful actions have helped to ensure that the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed.
- Pupils behave well. The school's family philosophy is taken extremely seriously. Of note, is the care shown by older pupils to ensure that younger pupils are included and supported. Most pupils have excellent attendance. They said they were 'really happy' and enjoyed coming to school.
- Teachers question the pupils thoughtfully to involve them in discussion and to check their understanding. Teachers are creative in the ways they engage and enthuse the pupils. In class 1, pupils were keen to show the teacher that they understood 'whales logging'. They accurately 'modelled' the behaviour that whales exhibit when at rest (they appear like logs at the surface of the water). The pupils thoroughly enjoyed this learning.
- Teaching assistants are deployed well. They skilfully facilitate pupils' learning and are an important part of the school's community. Pupils in Class 1, for example,

were keen to show me the beautifully formed cursive writing they had produced with the help of their teaching assistant support.

- Staff work well with parents and communication between home and school is good. The school website contains some useful information and many parents find this easy to access. However, some documents available on the website are out of date, including some policy information.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the effective work to ensure that all pupils, including pupils with SEND, produce high-quality, accurate and well-presented work across a range of subjects continues
- more regular opportunities are planned to deepen more-able pupils' knowledge and understanding, extend and apply their skills and challenge their thinking
- the outdoor provision within the early years is further developed, including the garden area
- all the required information on the website is up to date
- partnership working with other schools continues to develop.

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

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and members of the governing body, including the vice-chair and the chair of the finance committee. You and I visited all classes, observed learning, spoke with pupils and looked at their work. I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils and spoke with 11 parents and grandparents at the start of the school day. I considered the views of parents and carers posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. We conducted an analysis of key stage 1 and 2 pupils' work across a range of subjects. I evaluated a range of documents, including leaders' self-evaluation, development plan, safeguarding records and policies. Together we reviewed the school website. I spoke by telephone to a local authority associate school improvement adviser.