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Mrs Jess Mills  
Headteacher  
St Agnes ACE Academy  
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Dear Mrs Mills

### **Short inspection of St Agnes ACE Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 6 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 January 2010.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The areas identified for improvement during that inspection, including pupils' progress in writing, have been addressed well.

Since you became headteacher in September 2017, you have quickly gained an accurate view of the school's performance. Your prompt and decisive action is further improving pupils' progress and behaviour. You and the new leadership team are tackling successfully a recent dip in key stage 2 in standards in mathematics. You are also raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially boys in reading and phonics, through setting higher targets. Over time, pupils have consistently achieved above-average standards by the end of key stage 1. This has also been the case for the most able pupils by the end of key stage 2. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported well throughout the school and make good progress. You are aware that pupils whose prior attainment has been average, or who are disadvantaged, are not making the progress that they should. You and other leaders are taking effective action to tackle this.

In raising achievement and in managing the expansion of the school to two-form entry, you are ably supported by the new leadership team and the local advisory board (LAB). The LAB provides insightful reports on the impact of the school's work which guide further improvement. You also draw effectively on the high quality of support provided through the Atlantic Centre of Excellence (ACE) Multi-Academy Trust.

You are ensuring that the extension to the original school building provides a vibrant learning environment through high-quality displays of pupils' work. You are continuing to develop the school grounds to provide further opportunities for effective learning. This includes the forest school and early years areas. You are successfully engaging parents and carers and the local community in the work of the school. For example, children in the early years recently made pizzas for themselves in a restaurant in the village. 'Ocean champions', who are concerned about the effect of plastics on the coastal environment, are supported well by other pupils and families in promoting a plastic-free school. In addition, pupils compete against other local schools in a range of sports events. They are gaining a good reputation for winning!

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and the LAB have created a culture of vigilance with regard to safeguarding pupils. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All the required recruitment checks on staff are diligently carried out and records are well organised. Robust monitoring systems ensure that all staff have undertaken up-to-date training in keeping children safe, including from radicalisation and extremism. Consequently, the staff are confident and competent in dealing with any issues that arise. You also make good use of the local authority services to support pupils and families.

Pupils reported that they feel safe in school and Ofsted's online surveys show that parents and staff agree. Pupils have noticed the more consistent approach by staff to managing behaviour and any bullying incidents. Pupils say that there is little bullying in school. They demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep safe, which they learn for example through 'e-safety days'.

### **Inspection findings**

- To ascertain that the school remains good, my first line of enquiry was to explore how successfully leaders are improving progress and attainment in key stage 2. Through your incisive evaluation, you have identified the current pupils who are underachieving. You have implemented a robust system for tracking the progress of all pupils consistently as they move throughout the school. Pupils' progress is accurately and regularly evaluated and teachers are appropriately held to account. Relevant intervention for individual pupils and groups is identified when needed and its impact is checked. This process is helping teachers to use progress information to plan work at the right level of challenge for all pupils from their different starting points. As a result, more pupils are making better progress in key stage 2 than previously. You have plans to share the progress information more fully with parents.
- The trust has supported you well in rigorously reviewing the use of the pupil premium funding to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils more precisely. Robust monitoring indicates that the progress of this group is improving. In addition, teaching assistants have been trained effectively to support pupils with low starting points, including those who are disadvantaged. They are

particularly skilled in questioning the pupils to enable them to think independently.

- Pupils make the most progress where teachers use a variety of strategies to check their understanding constantly and to reinforce or deepen their learning. However, this practice is not yet consistent across the school.
- My second line of enquiry was to check how well leaders are improving pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2. You and the trust are making good use of external support to develop the quality and impact of subject leadership. The mathematics leader is now gaining a more accurate view of progress across the school by monitoring and evaluating lessons, pupils' books and progress-tracking information. This is enabling the leader to provide training and support for the staff to address the specific issues identified. Staff report that they feel well supported by subject and senior leaders.
- Your new approach to mathematics is supporting the development of teachers' subject knowledge. Actions are leading to a more consistent approach by teachers across the school. Teaching is meeting the needs of the pupils whose prior attainment has been average, enabling them to make better progress. The approach is also helping teachers to identify and address gaps in pupils' previous learning. Its step-by-step process is developing girls' confidence in the subject. Together with the new marking and feedback policy, actions are helping teachers to identify accurately pupils' next steps to improve their work.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making most progress in mathematics where the teachers give them strategies to comprehend the questions and extend their thinking and verbal responses. This practice is not yet consistent across all year groups.
- The final line of enquiry involved exploring how well phonics is taught, especially in the early years. It also focused on whether leaders are reversing the declining three-year trend in boys' achievement in reading in the early years and in key stage 2. The proportion of pupils who passed the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017 was in line with the national average. While attainment in reading at the end of key stage 2 was also average, boys' attainment was below average.
- You are taking effective action to re-engage boys in reading. The new approach to teaching phonics, combined with staff training in the early years and key stage 1, is helping boys to tackle unfamiliar books and increase their fluency. The boys are also applying their phonic knowledge well in their writing. Another new strategy for accelerating pupils' reading across the school is motivating boys in key stage 2 to read more widely. In part this is due to the competitive element of the approach, but in the main it is because the boys are being introduced to books and authors that interest them.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, including those whose prior attainment has been average and the disadvantaged, make consistently good progress across all year groups, by:

- sharing the good practice within the school of checking pupils' understanding during lessons and reinforcing or deepening their learning
- extending pupils' thinking and their verbal responses through challenging questions and investigations.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the LAB and the chair of the board of directors of the ACE Multi-Academy Trust, and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you, the early years leader, key stage and subject leaders and the SEN coordinator. I also met the chair and members of the LAB, and the chief executive officer and some directors of the trust. I met informally with parents and spoke with staff and pupils at playtime. Together, you and I observed learning in all classes and examined a sample of pupils' work over time in their books, alongside their progress information. I also listened to a group of pupils reading. I examined a range of documents, including self-evaluation by you and the LAB, improvement planning and documents relating to pupils' progress and safeguarding. I took account of the 82 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and several written responses from parents. I considered the 22 responses to the online staff survey and 21 responses to the online pupil survey.