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Mrs Susan Sweet
Interim Executive Headteacher
Chilham, St Mary's Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Sweet

Short inspection of Chilham, St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017, 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 January 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 made a real difference since arriving at the school as interim executive headteacher in November 2016. You wasted no time in establishing what was needed to drive the school forward. You set about doing this with energy, urgency and enthusiasm. Your actions to support teaching and raise expectations have already had considerable impact. Parents and staff appreciate the effect these changes have had on motivating pupils and helping them to make progress. There is a shared sense of excitement about the future.

The school is at the heart of its community. Pupils are regularly involved in events at the church and around the village. Parents value the 'kind and caring' culture of the school. Relationships around the school are warm. Pupils told me that staff at the school are 'helpful and kind'. Pupils are proud of their school, and enjoy their learning. They work hard to achieve their learning targets and are aware that their progress is supported by tasks which are set at 'just the right level', in the words of one.

At the time of the previous inspection, the inspector recognised the many strengths of the school, including the behaviour of pupils. The recent review of the behaviour policy, and the positive rewards that leaders have introduced, motivate pupils and help staff to ensure that pupils continue to behave well.

At the previous inspection, the inspector identified a need to check how well phonics was taught and assessed. Leaders have addressed this effectively. Pupils get off to a good start in developing their understanding of phonics because they are presented with a range of meaningful opportunities to practise the sounds they are taught. Staff match learning activities to pupils' needs effectively. Pupils who read to me were able to apply their phonic skills well to help them tackle new words.

You have worked effectively with your governors and the local authority to identify the correct priorities for further improvement and are taking the right actions to secure them. The school benefits from working with the local cluster of schools to share expertise and systems. The new assessment system has supported staff effectively in planning appropriate next steps for teaching. It enables leaders, including governors, to have an accurate understanding of pupils' progress across the school. While progress is mostly good, leaders know that there are some groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils, whose progress needs to improve further to ensure that it is at least in line with that of other pupils nationally. While your work to raise pupils' attendance has led to some improvements, overall attendance also needs to rise further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' safety is at the centre of everything that you do. For example, the school occupies several small buildings, so movement around the school has rightly been carefully considered. Pupils feel safe at school, and learn how to keep themselves safe. They told me about the recent work helping them learn how to stay safe online. Parents are highly satisfied with how the school cares for their children.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff receive regular and appropriate training about safeguarding. Processes to record any concerns are clear, and understood by all. Regular meetings ensure that information is shared appropriately. Leaders work in partnership with a range of other agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the support that they need.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on key lines of enquiry which we agreed. The first of these was looking at how well leaders have utilised the many recent changes across the school to develop teaching and further improve pupils' progress. Staff told me how much they value the high-quality training provided for them. Teachers use the new assessment system to identify gaps in pupils' learning, and to ensure that teaching meets pupils' needs. Support staff are effective in ensuring that those pupils who need extra support or who have special educational needs/and or disabilities are well provided for.
- Governors have completed a skills audit and restructured their committees. This has ensured that they have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and can support and challenge leaders effectively.

- We also agreed to look at the progress of pupils in mathematics in key stage 2. In 2016, the progress made by pupils in mathematics in Year 6 was below that of pupils nationally. However, current data shows that pupils are now making good progress from their different starting points across key stage 2. This is evident in pupils' mathematics books when we looked at them together. There are still some variations in staff expectations, but leaders are aware of this, and regular sharing of work across classes and partner schools is helping to raise standards further.
- While disadvantaged pupils make good progress in mathematics, this is not as rapid as for other pupils. However, the additional support that is in place develops pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding effectively. This is raising pupils' confidence and enjoyment in mathematics.
- Lastly, we agreed to look at the standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar across the school. In 2016, Year 6 pupils attained levels in these areas that were below those of pupils nationally. We wanted to check that expectations were high enough across the school. Leaders acknowledge that this is a priority area. Staff training and a regular focus on these skills has resulted in higher expectations of spelling and punctuation. Teaching has helped pupils develop their grammatical understanding and their ability to use a range of grammatical features to improve their writing. Consequently, we saw some rapid improvements in pupils' writing in their books. Pupils are taking increasing pride and care in their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance of pupils rises to be at least in line with that of other pupils nationally
- the high expectations reflected in some pupils' books are more consistently evident across the school
- the progress of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics rises to be at least in line with that of other pupils nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Gordon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, a group of governors and staff. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the diocese and met with representatives from the local authority. I observed pupils around the school and in their classes. Together, we visited all classes and one support group. I observed teaching and learning, looked at books and spoke to pupils about their work. I also met with five pupils to seek their views of the school, looked at their work and listened to them read. I took account of 22 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including free text responses and eight responses to the staff survey.