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Mrs Julia Sulston  
Headteacher  
Oakley Church of England Combined School  
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Dear Mrs Sulston

### **Short inspection of Oakley Church of England Combined School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 December 2015, 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 September 2009.

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

Following a period of instability, including your absence for most of the summer term, you are re-establishing your clear expectations. You have ensured that the school is now on a more secure footing, while successfully maintaining the good quality of education seen at the time of the last inspection. Despite some significant challenges, it is testament to the highly committed staff team, coupled with well-timed support from Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, that standards remain high. Pupils too are playing their part. They naturally adopt a sunny disposition, acting as very positive school ambassadors. They form strong friendships across the age ranges and see the best in everything. For example, even though pupils in the Year 5 and Year 6 class have had several teachers this term, they cite confidently that this helps them get used to different teachers in readiness for secondary school.

Since the previous inspection, standards have continued to rise. Many pupils make good progress and achieve the standards expected for their age in reading and mathematics. Leaders place a high importance on pupils developing their reading skills well. In 2015, Key Stage 1 pupils all achieved the standard expected for their age. The proportion gaining the higher levels at Key Stage 2 was well above the national average. Governors' plans to extend the school library are appealing to pupils, who are enthusiastic about reading. School leaders are appropriately addressing a recent dip in writing standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015. This year, most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are working at the level

expected for their age, and many are working above. This is because tasks hold appeal and are well matched to pupils' starting points. However, pupils' pride in, and presentation of, their work is yet to do their skills and abilities full justice.

The school's relationship with the local community is central to pupils' experiences and pupils relish opportunities to contribute positively. Equally, they receive much in return, readily welcoming local visitors into school, learning extensively from their varied tales and experiences. Parents too appreciate the emphasis on the school's values of love, honesty and respect, alongside, as one parent described, 'the school's endearing family feel'. Parents remark that their children flourish at Oakley C of E Combined School because teachers nurture and support individual needs well, all within a cohesive and inclusive school community.

Alongside the supportive and watchful eye of Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, you have worked methodically to ensure that high quality teaching and learning opportunities are prevalent. Leaders monitor standards closely and are quick to initiate support and training for staff as appropriate. Staff welcome training opportunities wholeheartedly, appreciating the chance to develop their expertise. As a result, many teachers, including those at an early stage of their career, are improving their teaching skills well and pupils' progress is accelerating. However, leaders do not afford the same attention to detail when monitoring temporary staff. Consequently, when several different teachers teach classes due to staff absence, there is some slippage in the high standards expected.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified a need to ensure that pupils' progress is accelerated, including in the early years. They also identified a need to make more imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT), to inspire and motivate pupils' learning.

Leaders have addressed all of these aspects effectively so that:

- The majority of pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Children in the early years make at least typical progress and many make rapid gains in their learning. Last year, the proportion of children who were ready for Year 1 at the end of Reception was above that found nationally.
- Pupils respond well to learning opportunities, including those that make good use of ICT.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Senior leaders prioritise keeping staff and pupils safe. In recent times, leaders have reviewed and overhauled the school's health and safety procedures to improve their effectiveness. They have exemplified their commitment by undertaking additional training at an appropriate level and recently completing an Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) qualification. Risk assessments have been

suitably updated and governors keep a sharp oversight to make sure all aspects of the school's provision meet health and safety requirements. A recent external review judged that all aspects of health and safety are good. Parents and pupils are unanimous in their view that the school is a safe place to be.

The school makes appropriate checks on all adults, including volunteers and temporary staff, to confirm their suitability to work with children. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and have a good understanding of how to initiate support if concerns emerge. The school works well with a variety of outside agencies to provide additional support to families if the need arises. When this has been the case, outcomes are positive, such as pupils improving their attendance. However, leaders' knowledge and understanding of the Government's Prevent Strategy is not developed fully. Available information and training for staff, to help ensure that pupils are safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation is underdeveloped.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders rigorously evaluate school performance, using first-hand observations increasingly regularly, alongside pupil performance information to inform their judgements. Monitoring information is used effectively to drive further improvement. As a result, the school's improvement plan is detailed, clearly understood and focuses on the right priorities. Staff embrace the challenges set and work resolutely to ensure that improvement is made quickly and effectively.
- Pupils benefit from regular opportunities to write for a range of different purposes. Over the course of the term, pupils have increased their productivity well in a wide range of genres, including captions, lists, reports, poems and stories. Pupils transfer their grammatical skills accurately, enlivening their texts effectively. For example, in the Year 3 and Year 4 class, pupils made good use of similes to describe a winter's scene, with one pupil writing, 'The snow was as soft as puffy, white clouds floating through the sky'. The teacher used ICT well to spark pupils' imagination and creativity. Pupils are making good progress and producing high-quality texts. Pupils do not always present their work carefully or neatly, and comment that it does not really matter. This aspect of pupils' writing requires further improvement.
- The deputy headteacher has responsibility for mathematics. She has made some well-judged changes to ensure that pupils have plentiful opportunities to consolidate and extend their mathematical skills. She has shared her vision for effective mathematics teaching with staff, who, in turn, have worked diligently to implement new ways of working. Pupils confidently use their solid grasp of a variety of complex calculation strategies to solve problems involving time, money and measures. Teachers encourage pupils to apply their skills in a variety of contexts, and more pupils are exceeding the

expectations for their age than in the past. Pupils say that they enjoy learning and thrive on challenge.

- Reading is a real strength. Pupils say they enjoy quiet times when they have opportunities to get lost in books. In the Reception class, children listened well, showing high levels of engagement with a Christmas story that their teacher was reading aloud. They used the story eagerly to consolidate and further develop their grasp of phonics (the sounds that letters make), identifying successfully rhyming patterns. The process of learning to read, combined with engaging texts, ensures that pupils develop a love of reading from the word go.
- Teachers provide helpful and constructive feedback to pupils. Pupils understand how to improve their work and are clear what their next steps to achieve success are. Pupils offer much praise for the support they receive from their teachers. Pupils commented that, 'If we are not sure, then we get helpful, longer explanations to make sure we learn well'. Just on occasion, pupils say that they would benefit from more time to respond so they can consolidate their skills and deepen their understanding. They show high levels of commitment and enthusiasm in all aspects of their learning.
- Since the previous inspection, attendance has improved and it is now broadly average. Governors monitor this aspect of the school's performance closely and ensure that parents are kept up to date on a weekly basis. Attendance for some pupils has shown significant improvement because the school has worked vigorously with families to ensure that regular attendance is of high priority for all.
- School leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning closely. Inexperienced teachers, and those who may require additional help from time to time, are supported well. Leaders align training opportunities and performance management targets closely to individual needs. As a result, leaders have made a real difference to improving staff skills and expertise. However, leaders do not afford the same level of scrutiny to temporary teachers. As a result, some of the school's high expectations, such as those that aspire to high-quality feedback to pupils, are not always met.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. Gaps between disadvantaged pupils' attainment compared to their peers have closed completely in all subjects. Disadvantaged pupils now achieve as well as others in writing. In reading and mathematics, they achieve higher standards than other pupils nationally. This is because pupils are well supported, rapidly conquering any skills or concepts they find tricky.
- Teaching assistants have benefited from recent training. They are positive about the way that school leaders support their professional development and are utilising their skills well to support pupils effectively in lessons. Teaching

assistants who support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are highly accomplished at integrating pupils well into class activities. They rephrase or repeat teachers' instructions skilfully, including the use of visual prompts, to ensure that individual pupils understand and make good progress.

- Pupils forge strong friendships. The school's buddy system contributes well, with Year 6 pupils showing high levels of care towards younger pupils in the Reception class. Parents of Reception aged children particularly appreciate the attentiveness of older pupils. They note that this extends to ensuring that their children even try new things to eat at lunchtime!
- Measures to help children start school happily are well considered and effective. Younger pupils settle into school life swiftly and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the ease of transition. Since the previous inspection, leaders have forged stronger links with the adjoining pre-school and children feel they are simply moving class rather than changing school. Children make good progress in the development of their writing, reading and number skills. Most start Year 1 well equipped for the next stage.
- Pupils enjoy sporting opportunities. They talk excitedly about their activities, including tag rugby and multi skills sessions, while acknowledging that they do not always have enough players to form a team. Nevertheless, they revel in the competitive opportunities that come their way, including the school's sports day and a local dance competition with other schools. This year, pupils have set their sights even higher by aiming for a bronze award in the dance competition. Their determination to excel shines through.
- Consultants from Buckinghamshire Learning Trust and an adviser from Oxfordshire diocese have monitored the school's performance closely. They are quick to act and ensure that the status quo is maintained when difficulties arise, such as recent staff absence. During the summer term, advisers brokered the services of an experienced headteacher from Cuddington and Dinton Church of England School who successfully oversaw proceedings in your absence. Parents appreciate the extent to which leaders and governors prioritise the smooth running of the school, minimising disruption as much as is possible, when changes occur.
- Governors are highly committed to maintaining the high standards in the school and they offer good levels of challenge to the headteacher. They are keen to improve their skills and expertise further, increasingly making good use of the information that they gather to evaluate the effectiveness of school policies and procedures. This enables productive discussion that contributes well to shaping school priorities.
- Parents are generally positive, noting that their children are happy and are well cared for. Many note the school's flexibility in meeting their needs, such

as the last minute booking of a place at the school breakfast or after school clubs. Parents are particularly positive about how caring adults are, nurturing pupils and supporting their social development particularly well. Some say that they would like more information on how well their child is learning.

- Pupils behave well, listen attentively to their teachers and are adept at turn taking and sharing. They are very positive role models and are keen ambassadors of the school. They enjoy taking responsibility, such as the recent opportunity for school councillors to conduct a 'behaviour walk' to evaluate how well pupils listen and respond to instructions. Informed by their findings, representatives adapted class behaviour systems, ensuring that these were understood clearly by all. Such activities make certain pupils are directly involved in decision-making, creating a real sense of ownership and belonging. Subsequently, all pupils show high levels of engagement with school routines and expectations.
- Pupils are afforded timely opportunities to contribute well to the wider community. Recently, they have delivered Christmas hampers to local residents, as well as leading a lantern parade for the school's Christingle Service at the local church. They enjoy hosting afternoon tea for the villagers' 'afternoon club'. As a result, pupils are playing a positive role within their local community and fostering a strong sense of citizenship.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- when temporary teaching arrangements exist, the school's high expectations of teaching and learning are monitored closely and met consistently
- pupils' handwriting skills improve so that work is presented to a high standard and that pupils show increasing levels of pride in their efforts
- parents are well informed about their child's progress
- staff expertise on how to keep children safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation is strengthened.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, pupils and four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I met with a representative of Buckinghamshire Learning Trust. We visited all classes and scrutinised pupils' work. I took account of 30 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I observed pupils' behaviour on arrival at school and during the school day. I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I analysed a range of school documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.