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1 March 2016

Mrs Laura Cooper
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cooper

Short inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 2016, 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 June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong and determined leadership ensures that staff at every level are inspired to improve their work. Self-evaluation of the school's performance remains a strength. Because of this, school leaders, including governors, are aware of the key priorities for development to ensure the school improves to be outstanding.

During my visit, it was clear that you have the respect and admiration of pupils, parents and staff alike. Middle leaders are particularly appreciative of the responsibility and authority you have invested in them. The impact of their work has been particularly helpful in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

Pupils told me that they enjoy coming to school, because it's a happy place where they meet their friends and enjoy learning. They were keen to explain what they were learning, or what they were looking forward to next. One Year 6 pupil could hardly contain his excitement at the prospect of working on the 'Goblin Car' and entering local grand prix races during the summer, pulling back the dust cover to show me the bare framework of the car, as other younger pupils looked on in total awe.

The behaviour of pupils is excellent. They demonstrate a pride in the school and were both polite and respectful during the conversations I had with them. Because of their positive attitudes to learning and the very good quality of teaching they receive, it was very evident that pupils make very strong progress in all areas of the curriculum.

Pupils told me that teachers make learning fun. This was particularly apparent in the Reception class when I was informed in a very matter-of-fact way about the benefits of 'pinchy fingers' when holding a pen, or how exciting it was to fly to Africa or Australia in the role-play aeroplane, complete with wheeled suitcases.

A very strong family-oriented culture, based on clearly stated Christian values, is evident in the day-to-day life of the school. The emphasis on developing the whole child, as well as striving for academic excellence, was clear to me throughout my visit. The assembly you led engaged pupils well and strongly reinforced these values.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including good partnerships with parents, the wider community and outside agencies; excellent extra-curricular opportunities for pupils; and good self-evaluation from school leaders. The inspection also identified a need to increase the progress pupils make, especially in mathematics and by those with more ability, and to provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their independence. Leaders have addressed these matters effectively so that:

- pupils of all abilities now make very good progress in all subjects, especially in mathematics, where the proportion of pupils making excellent rates of progress and achieving at higher levels is now much higher than the national average
- pupils benefit from a range of opportunities both in and outside the classroom to develop a sense of responsibility and independence.

Since the last inspection, leaders and governors have continued to identify the key priorities for improvement. You were able to explain very clearly the strengths of the school, as well as areas that still need to be developed. You are already working to improve the quality of feedback teachers give to pupils, especially those pupils in Key Stage 1, in order for them to improve their work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Children are safe in this school. Leaders and governors ensure that the safety of pupils is paramount and that this important aspect of the school has a high profile. Staff, especially non-teaching support staff, are vigilant and aware of the procedures and routines that are required to keep children safe. Parents strongly agree that their children are safe in the school and the children themselves were able to explain the rules that help them to keep safe both in and out of school.

Leaders have ensured that child protection and safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular and appropriate training about safeguarding. Governors have also received bespoke training. Policies, including those closely linked to the safeguarding of children, are up to date. Records, including the single central record, are maintained in an efficient manner.

Inspection findings

- You provide strong and effective leadership for the school and have worked hard since the last inspection to maintain high standards and to make the improvements required to help this school become outstanding. Middle leaders are playing an increasingly effective role, especially in supporting teachers to improve further.
- Governors show a huge pride in the school and are very keen to play their part in supporting you. They recognise that, with an influx of new governors, they will need to ensure that training and development are given a high priority. A good start has been made on this, with the support of the local authority already having good impact.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years because of good leadership and the high-quality provision provided by staff. Children are well prepared to move to Year 1 by the end of their year in the Reception class.
- The school's phonics provision is strong, with the number of pupils achieving the expected standard in Year 1 above the national average. Very few pupils enter Key Stage 2 without the phonics skills required. Those that do are supported well, with a range of strategies used to enable them to become confident readers.
- Outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are very sound across the school. This is because of the good quality of teaching that pupils receive. Pupils make good progress from their different starting points, especially in Key Stage 2. Outcomes in mathematics are particularly strong and are a testament to the focus for improvement given to mathematics in recent years.
- The small number of pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds do well at St John's. This is also true of the small number of pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- Teachers know their pupils well. Expectations are high. Because of this, pupils at every level are challenged appropriately. The school has identified that teaching and support staff could do better at helping pupils to know how to improve their work, especially in Key Stage 1.
- The well-developed 'buddy' system is a strength and has been developed far beyond what might normally be seen in primary schools. Parents feel that this aspect of pastoral care contributes strongly to the family ethos of the school. It encourages their children to be confident, independent and responsible for their own actions, and prepares older pupils for their move to secondary education.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and engages pupils well. Pupils' physical and emotional well-being is promoted in a number of ways, including year-round weekly swimming lessons for pupils in Years 2 to 5.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance is good for the vast majority of pupils. The school monitors absence well and supports those families whose children, for whatever reason, cannot attend school as often as would be hoped.
- The support of the local authority has been useful in recent times, ensuring leaders and governors have stayed focused on the aspects of school leadership that matter most. The impact of this support is also apparent in the early years provision, where outcomes for children are now particularly strong.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers and support staff continue to improve the quality of their feedback, so that pupils are clearer about how to improve their work in order to make outstanding progress
- the governing body fully develops its capacity to become as effective as possible in supporting and challenging leaders to make this an outstanding school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex County Council and the Director of Education for the Chichester diocese. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Close

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, middle leaders, pupils, governors and a representative of the diocese. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I visited every classroom at least once, in many cases jointly with you. I observed pupils' behaviour in and around the school, including during their morning break. I also attended an assembly. I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the day and took into account the 90 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I analysed a wide range of school documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, your own self-evaluation, the school development plan, minutes of governors' meetings, records of visits by the local authority, safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.