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Mrs T Kaunhoven
St Aldhelm's Church of England Primary School
Chelynch Park
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Dear Mrs Kaunhoven

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

Following my visit to the school on Tuesday 8 March 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 March 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The school has experienced significant staffing problems since the previous inspection. However, it is clear from my visit that the school is firmly back on track and providing a good quality of education. Furthermore, leaders and managers have the commitment and capacity to continue to improve the school. There is a shared understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need improving. Staff and governors refer to 'a welcomed change to the culture of the school'. There is a real 'have a go' feeling and this is having a strong impact on school improvement. The team spirit and camaraderie between staff and governors is very obvious. There is a shared understanding of doing the very best for all pupils in school.

At the time of the previous inspection, the role of middle leaders was underdeveloped. They lacked basic training in their roles and did not have opportunities to work out of their own classroom to check teaching, learning and pupils' progress. During the past year, your middle leaders have developed into a strong and unified team that works very closely together. They are passionate about getting provision just right for all the different groups of pupils in the school. They have welcomed appropriate training opportunities and time to work beyond their own classroom to focus on the specific subjects that they are leading. Middle leaders are very appreciative of the time you give them to develop their subject or specialist areas. They speak highly of the professional discussions that they share with you and the opportunities they have had to 'grow into their roles'. Middle leaders regularly look at pupils' books to check that all teachers use the school's marking policy consistently. Pupils are frequently involved in this process too, and this helps

middle leaders check the interest and motivation that the pupils have in their learning. Middle leaders regularly review lessons and points for development are shared openly and honestly among colleagues.

At the time of the previous inspection, the school was also asked to improve the accuracy of pupils' spelling and help them develop a wider vocabulary to support their writing. This you have tackled effectively. Pupils learn spellings regularly. Pupils are also introduced to a new word each week. They learn what each word means and are required to spell it correctly. For example, pupils explained to me that they had learned the meaning of such words as 'perplexed' and 'spine-chilling' and could use these words in an accurate context.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and managers place the highest priority on the safeguarding of all pupils. Maintaining the safety and welfare of every pupil is paramount. Arrangements are fit for purpose and integral to everyday life in school. For example, the weekly staff meetings always commence with an update of any child protection or safety concerns, and any changes to government requirements. All staff have been trained and know what to do if they have a worry or concern about a child. Records are detailed and concerns always followed up. You work well with external agencies and remain vigilant, even when cases are deemed to be closed.

You and your governors know how to recruit staff safely and ensure that successful applicants are carefully vetted prior to employment. You have a clear understanding of the need to protect pupils against all possible risks. Recent training on the government's 'Prevent' duty, which deals with the risk of radicalisation, has been undertaken and staff feel confident in reporting and challenging any concerns.

Pupils report that their school is a safe place to be and know they can go to an adult for help and advice. Pupils understand the dangers that they may encounter when using the internet or their mobile phone. Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire, Parent View, also agreed that their children felt safe at school.

Inspection findings

- You and your governors fully admit that turbulence in staffing over the past two years has had a detrimental effect on the progress of one particular group of pupils. This was reflected in the 2015 Key Stage 1 national tests where overall standards for Year 2 declined significantly. You sensibly put in extra support for this group when they started Year 3 in September. However, their progress was further interrupted by another unforeseen disruption to their teaching. You have swiftly put in place steps to ensure that they are now receiving consistent teaching. This is being supplemented by high-quality support. You are very carefully checking the progress of these

pupils and have put secure plans in place to make sure that they receive the best quality teaching and learning as they move up the school. During my visit, current standards in this year group were seen to be improving, with clear examples of strong progress evidenced in the pupils' books.

- Following a dip in standards in 2014 at the end of Key Stage 2, which also reflected some turbulence in staffing, the proportion of pupils attaining the appropriate level for their age returned in 2015 to significantly above the national averages in reading, writing and spelling, punctuation and grammar. Current standards seen in this year group confirm that pupils are working either at or above age-related expectations. The focus on extending the pupils' vocabulary was clearly evident in the high-quality writing being produced in literacy during my visit. However, it was not so evident in other subjects across the curriculum.
- Standards in mathematics have not been as strong as in other subjects. Following training which focused on providing more challenge to the pupils, you and your teachers have enthusiastically adopted a more flexible way to teaching mathematics. Pupils are taught in groups where activities are matched to meet their needs. However, pupils are not fixed to one particular group but are moved around according to their current needs. Teachers are also ensuring that pupils receive plenty of practical mathematical experiences so they can visualise what they are learning. They know that the next step is to encourage pupils to use their mathematical skills in other subjects across the curriculum.
- Although your disadvantaged pupils do as well as those nationally, you are fully aware that, except for writing at the end of Key Stage 2, there has been a gap between those who are disadvantaged and those who are not. You are also aware that, in the past, pupils with special educational needs have not always done as well as they could. This is being steadily rectified through a reorganisation of the timings for the support these pupils receive. After taking up the headship, you quickly realised that the pupils who were receiving extra help were taken out of lessons at inappropriate times. This meant that they missed out on the teaching of key skills and new concepts. Support groups are now timetabled for set sessions which do not disrupt the overall quality of their learning. 'Passports' for those pupils with special educational needs provide high-quality communication between school and home, and indicate the success that the support groups have on progress.
- Information shared with me during my visit confirms that pupils' progress is improving for all groups of pupils. Middle leaders accurately highlight that the introduction of greater challenge within each lesson has contributed to this. Pupils are very enthusiastic about moving from the bronze level to the more challenging work expected for silver, gold and even platinum. As pupils explained to me, 'We always aim for at least gold.'

- You and your teaching staff have a clear rationale for supporting the most able. For example, when involved in writing activities, they are encouraged not to put a limit on what they write. Teaching staff actively suggest that they use more exciting vocabulary and extend what they have written. Homework tasks provide high-quality opportunities for the most able to excel. History projects based around the ancient Greeks or Romans stimulate pupils to carry out creative design technology tasks at home. For example, pupils prepare a Greek banquet for parents in the style of a popular television programme which is then scored on quality and presentation.
- Pupils are extremely well-behaved, polite and courteous. They have a clear understanding of what the difference is between right and wrong. Pupils have a mature approach to the importance of equality, diversity and mutual respect. They have a developing understanding of the principles of democracy when they elect members of the school council on an annual basis. Although some parents report that the school's comprehensive reward system is complicated, pupils understand its principles and are delighted to be awarded for good work.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning and love coming to school. They find lessons interesting and really enjoy the challenge provided by their teachers. As one parent reported, 'My child is very happy at school and is keen to learn.'
- Pupils appreciate that their learning is brought to life through trips to Caerleon, Kilve and London. They read widely and have an extensive knowledge of a range of different authors. Pupils know what to do if they are stuck on a word because they have been taught the sounds of letters well.
- A recent review of governance reported that 'governors are fully supportive of the school and are keen to contribute fully to the school's continued improvement'. Recommendations from this review have been swiftly put in place following extensive advice and training. Governors also bring a wealth of professional expertise to their roles and are not afraid to challenge you and your staff. They refer to the school as having 'an open door', as exemplified when parents are welcomed into school fortnightly for assemblies and monthly to look at their children's work. Governors are proud of the many visits they undertake to see for themselves the pupils and staff at work. This has enabled them to really get to know the school well.
- Most parents are pleased with all the school and the education it provides. As one parent explained: 'Both my children are making exceptional progress... they both thoroughly enjoy their time at school, feeling safe and secure.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they secure a stable teaching staff so that all pupils benefit from consistent learning experiences
- pupils have further opportunities to apply their mathematical and writing skills across a wider range of relevant contexts.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

You were appointed as headteacher in April 2015. During the past year, there have been significant changes to the membership of the governing body.

I met with you and your deputy headteacher and we discussed improvements since the last inspection. In particular, we discussed the development of the role of middle leaders and improvements made to the accuracy of pupils' spelling and their wider use of vocabulary. We also discussed your self-evaluation and the initiatives you were taking to further school improvement. We visited all classes and looked at books together. I held discussions with your middle leaders and eight governors, including the two Co-Chairs of the Governing Body. I also met with a representative from the local authority. I met with a group of pupils and reviewed the comments made by staff on the online questionnaire. I looked at the survey results from Parent View and considered the comments submitted by parents.