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Mrs Holly Obank
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Dear Mrs Obank

Short inspection of Mountnessing Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 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 leadership team has returned the school to the good quality of education seen at the last inspection. The school has been through a time of very significant change which has caused parents and their children some concerns. Since your return from maternity leave in July 2015, to the full-time headteacher position, you have taken rapid and rigorous action to address a decline in teaching and standards. As a result, staff morale has increased and teachers are challenging pupils to reach higher standards.

A trend of rising attainment halted in 2015, when standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 dipped. Current assessment information, pupils' work and the views of pupils and staff show that the school is back on track for pupils to reach higher standards at the end of this academic year. Leaders have carefully analysed pupils' work and teachers are quickly addressing any gaps that have been identified.

Some parents, particularly of older pupils, quite rightly expressed their concerns about the number of changes to staffing that have taken place, and the school's failure to communicate what had happened and why. They also feel that they have not received sufficient information about their children's progress. Plans are in place to remedy this, and careful thought is being given to creating new systems for involving parents more fully in understanding how well their children are doing at school.

Parents of younger children expressed their confidence in the good start their children have made to their education and were highly appreciative of the efforts staff have made to ensure their children settle happily into school and start to learn quickly.

There is good evidence to show that members of the leadership team you now have in place are knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility and have identified the right aspects of the school's work that need to improve.

Teachers have a detailed understanding of the progress and attainment of the pupils they teach and are using this well to support and challenge them. Pupils said that the teachers they have now are 'pushing us to do better'; one pupil in Year 6 said of her teacher 'sometimes you don't believe you can do something and she makes you know you can do it; I'm learning better every day'.

The work of governors is well organised through a range of monitoring activities identified in the school development plan, such as termly meetings with subject leaders to discuss pupils' achievement. Since the fall in attainment in the 2015 tests, they have more rigorously challenged and monitored the accuracy of the information they receive from you and from other leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Appropriate checks are made on staff and volunteer suitability to work with children and requirements for the safe recruitment of staff are met. All staff are trained in child protection procedures and necessary referrals to wider agencies are made appropriately. 'Prevent' training has been provided to ensure governors and staff understand the risks to pupils of exposure to extremism. This rigorous approach to safeguarding children is made clear on the school's website.

Inspection findings

- You have provided effective leadership to bring the school back to a position where pupils are benefiting from good teaching. As a result, pupils – including disadvantaged pupils and those who face barriers to their learning – are making better progress. The school's assessment information shows that pupils are on track to achieve higher standards at the end of this academic year.
- You use the systems you have established for tracking pupils' progress effectively. You have made sure that the assessments that underpin your analysis are accurate by getting teachers to work together, and with other schools, to standardise their judgements. Where your tracking has shown that pupils have fallen behind, the sharp action you have taken this year through well-planned interventions is helping them to catch up.
- With your support, the work of subject leaders has been very effective. This includes, in English, sharpening teachers' expectations for the presentation of pupils' work and their handwriting; and, following an analysis of the quality of pupils' reading, providing guidance on the teaching and assessment of reading. The mathematics subject leader has rightly focused on analysing the gaps in the older pupils' knowledge and has planned to address these well.

- Funding received to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to provide extra tuition and wider enrichment for eligible pupils. As a result disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress to their peers.
- Children in the early years make a good start to their education. Daily assessment and analysis means their learning is carefully planned for. Parents' views of their children's abilities and progress are taken into account. Children make good progress and the vast majority reach expected and better outcomes.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 fell in 2015 from being above to below the national average. Pupils currently in Year 1 are developing and using their understanding of letters and the sounds they make effectively. The school's assessments suggest that pupils in Key Stage 1 are on track to reach at least the expected standards in reading and writing by the end of Year 2.
- The actions you have taken have quickly improved the quality of teaching. You give teachers detailed feedback about the quality of their work and ensure appropriate training is in place to remedy any weaknesses, as well as to equip them to meet the demands of new initiatives. This includes, for example, implementing new approaches to teaching mathematics so that pupils develop a deeper understanding of key concepts.
- Teachers plan to meet the different needs of pupils carefully and teaching assistants help pupils to develop their skills well. In a Year 5 and 6 mathematics lesson, for example, a group of pupils used string to analyse the properties of different shapes, while another group investigated complex number patterns which enabled them to draw spirals. The teacher's lively, interactive summarising of key facts at the end of the lesson meant pupils consolidated their understanding in a very memorable way.
- Pupils are keen to learn and work hard in lessons. They say they feel safe in school; the parents I spoke to agreed. Pupils know that the school's computers have firewalls that prevent access to any inappropriate information and that they should not share personal information online. Pupils understand the different types of bullying. They say the school's systems for managing behaviour work well and that there are staff they can share their worries with if they have any.
- Governors acknowledge that they did not challenge leaders sufficiently to ensure they had appropriate information about the standards pupils were achieving in 2015. They are working to address this, using external analysis of the school's work to provide accurate information. Governors' monitoring is now well planned and is giving them the information they need to evaluate how well improvement is proceeding. The governor responsible for safeguarding visits regularly, checks the central record of staff suitability to work with children and liaises well with you to ensure child protection procedures are effective.
- Governors keep a close eye on the use of resources and ensure that the additional funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils and to improve physical and sports education is targeted well. Although classroom environments are bright, lively and well organised, the physical condition of buildings and the environment need some attention. Financial resources are being built up to enable improvements to be made so that the physical environment reflects the high standards you set for pupils' learning and achievement.
- The local authority has monitored the school but, like the governors, did not predict the 2015 drop in standards. The current adviser is supporting you well to

address priorities and has worked to help you find suitable teachers. She has a detailed knowledge of how well the school is doing and is challenging you and governors to ensure improvement takes place.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- improve communication with parents so that they understand any changes that happen and know precisely how well their children are achieving against the expectations for their age
- ensure that the gaps identified in older pupils' learning are rapidly addressed so that pupils make the progress of which they are capable
- continue to use the strong expertise of subject leaders rigorously to ensure that teaching continues to improve so pupils make rapid progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Chelmsford and the Director of Children's Services for Essex County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the leaders of English, mathematics, early years and special educational needs and spoke to eight governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, to discuss how you have addressed the fall in outcomes in 2015. We also considered your own evaluation of the school's work and pupils' achievement and the actions you are taking to continue to improve the outcomes achieved by pupils. I discussed and noted the significant changes that have taken place in staffing and leadership. I spoke to a number of parents as they brought their children to school because responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated concerns. Together, we visited lessons in all classes during which I looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. I looked at pupils' books and also met with a group of pupils to explore what they thought about the school's work.