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Mrs Kate Steven
Whitchurch Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Steven

Short inspection of Whitchurch Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 January 2011.

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 already made a significant impact at the school since your arrival. This is because you have led with authority, passion and empathy. Following a period of instability at the school, you have quickly gained the respect of the community. Your calm and clear approach has brought much needed stability to the school.

You know the school really well. As an experienced leader you have been quick to realise that, despite indicators showing that the school is effective in many ways, there are some key areas that need improvement. You, ably supported by your new leadership team, have carried out an array of useful checks on the quality of teaching and learning. You have used the information to make accurate evaluations of the effectiveness of the school. Consequently, your plans for improvement are appropriately targeted to make the difference that is needed.

You are right to have identified the need to focus on leadership and management immediately. Most of the leaders at the school are either new to the school or new to leadership. They show much potential and are already benefiting from your experience as a leader. However, too much is currently reliant on you. The local authority has been quick to realise this and has already put in extra support to strengthen the skills of other leaders until you establish the leadership team that is needed.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains a strength of the school. The relationships that have been engendered between staff and pupils mean that teachers know the pupils really well. Consequently, they often plan lessons that are engaging and help many pupils make rapid and sustained progress from their starting points. This is reflected in the high standards attained by pupils, which have consistently improved for a number of years, including in science in which pupils were reported to be relatively underachieving at the time of the previous inspection.

Teachers now ensure that pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn in lessons. In key stage 2, pupils are given clear steps to success which they use to assess their own progress as the lesson is delivered. This means that the feedback given in this key stage is often relevant and clearly helps pupils make progress. The new acting assistant headteacher has brought much needed subject knowledge and vision to the teaching of science. Leaders have rightly identified there is still more to do to ensure that pupils' outcomes in science are as strong as those in writing and mathematics.

The curriculum has many strengths and is closely aligned to the Christian character of the school. Pupils benefit from very good opportunities to explore the arts, for example their performance of 'Joseph and his amazing technicolour dream coat'. Pupils develop strong moral and spiritual attitudes because their learning across the curriculum is linked well and helps them to explore what it means to be a modern British citizen.

Disadvantaged pupils make very good progress and often attain levels that are higher and sometimes much higher than other pupils nationally. This is because the pupil premium grant is used in a bespoke manner to support disadvantaged pupils with their specific needs. Furthermore, the high quality of teaching ensures that they make rapid gains in their skills and understanding and so any gap in their attainment compared with other pupils in the school is reduced from the moment they enter the school.

You have rightly worked closely with the early years leader to quickly improve early years provision. Children now have more opportunities to write because of the improvements you have made to the classrooms and outdoor spaces. For example, we saw children practising writing sentences using their knowledge of phonics (the link between letters and their sounds). We also saw children writing enthusiastically on clipboards outside as they planned their den building. The learning stories that we looked at show that children in the early years are making good progress in writing from their starting points.

As in the rest of the school, you have rightly identified that the teaching of phonics needs to be a focus in the early years. Before your arrival, expectations for what children should achieve were not high enough. You have addressed this by making improvements to how children are grouped for their phonics lessons. However, the teaching of phonics in the early years remains inconsistent. For example, in one lesson that we observed, we saw some children confidently writing full sentences to include the letter sounds that were being taught. However, in the same amount of time, almost half of the children had only written the first word on their whiteboards.

You and the early years leader are, rightly, already thinking of ways to re-organise these groups to make sure children make the same rapid progress as in other areas of their learning.

Governors provide effective support and challenge to leaders. They have bravely waited to ensure that they appoint the right person to lead the school on its next step of development. Your appointment is testament to their strategic influence, as you have already identified the precise issues that need tackling at the school and that had not been picked up well enough in the past.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are well led and effective. You have fully reviewed procedures and made improvements where they have been needed. This means that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff work well together to look after the children in their care. Checks on staff are carried out and carefully reviewed. References are appropriately sought from previous employers to ensure that the school appoints the right people.

You have taken action to strengthen the work of the family link worker, who is very effective. She has established excellent working relationships with the families with whom she works. With your support, she has helped improve the attendance of vulnerable pupils. Together, you ensure that there is an open culture among staff and between parents and the school. Appropriate safeguarding training is undertaken by relevant staff to ensure that statutory requirements are met. Relevant staff are also first-aid trained. As a team, you work extremely effectively with other agencies to ensure that concerns are appropriately shared and followed up.

Inspection findings

- The school is very effective. Many pupils make very strong progress in all areas of the school. The new headteacher is excellent and has already brought much-needed direction. The school is very well placed to improve further.
- There have been a large number of changes to staff at the school. This is particularly the case in leadership positions. This means that all leaders are either new to the school or new to leadership. The very effective leadership of the headteacher is already strengthening the skills and direction of other leaders, but this work is early in its development because many have only been at the school since January. This has rightly been identified as a key priority in the school plan.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good and sometimes better. For example, the teaching of mathematics is highly effective. Pupils learn a range of mathematical concepts in a number of interesting ways. Pupils report that they often enjoy their mathematics lessons. The work they undertake is often challenging and ensures that they are given opportunities to apply what they know to solve problems.
- The teaching of writing is also excellent. Pupils make good, and sometimes exceptional, progress from their starting points. By the time pupils reach

Year 6, many of them are working at levels that are much higher than you would expect for their age. This is because pupils are asked to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. They skilfully use what they learn through the curriculum to write text of the highest standard. For example, pupils' writing about religious art in Year 6 showed that they can skilfully apply their own spirituality and moral understanding to their writing.

- Teaching assistants make a very positive contribution to learning. They are often highly skilled and work exceptionally well with teachers to enhance learning. They are already benefiting from the strong focus the headteacher has given to reading, through training, to support the less-able readers as an example. They are committed to making a real difference to pupils' learning.
- Pupils continue to make good and sometimes better than good progress. Most groups of pupils make very good progress from their starting points. The headteacher has rightly identified that this is not the case for lower-attaining pupils who are neither disadvantaged or have a special educational need or a disability, particularly in reading. This reflects the slow start these pupils make in their language and reading skills. New initiatives, such as the book talk at the beginning of each day, are beginning to make a difference, but much more needs to be done for this specific group of pupils.
- On some occasions, the most able pupils are not challenged as much as they could be. This is reflected in the views of some pupils and parents and in some of the most able pupils' work where they are not required to extend their thinking.
- The headteacher has rightly made changes to how the school communicates with parents. Many appreciate the new parent forum meetings she has set up to hear their views. This is because, following the recent period of instability, some parents remain concerned about the impact of the recent changes on their children's education.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are a credit to the school and the community. They work very hard and make the most of the quality of teaching they experience. They enjoy the increased responsibility they have been given at the school since the arrival of the headteacher.
- The local authority has provided useful support and challenge to this effective school. It has rightly identified the need to work closely with the school until the new leaders and managers have been established.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- less-able pupils achieve as well as their peers
- the teaching of phonics more consistently meets the needs of pupils
- they establish a fully effective leadership team to support the headteacher.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Hampshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the acting deputy headteacher, the acting assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and the leaders for the early years, key stage 1 and lower key stage 2. I also met with a group of governors, including the vice chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I completed lesson observations in six classes and visited both Year 6 classes, accompanied by you or the acting deputy headteacher, to observe teaching and to talk to pupils about what they were learning. I scrutinised the work of some the most able pupils, some pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding and some lower-attaining pupils from Years 2, 4 and 6, as well as looking through pupils' books in lessons. I considered the responses of 52 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 32 responses to the staff questionnaire and 27 answers to the pupils' survey. I analysed a range of documentation, including reports provided by the local authority, the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.