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Mrs Joanna O'Donoghue
Headteacher
South Malling Church of England Primary School
Church Lane
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Dear Mrs O'Donoghue

Short inspection of South Malling Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 June 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 December 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 lead the school very well and have the respect of all in the school community. Governors told me that they value your dedication and the strong leadership that you provide.

The support you receive from the wider leadership team, including your deputy, is impressive. Together, all staff, including support staff, are very focused on improving the school for the benefit of its pupils. The new position of 'leader of learning' is an exciting development. The stated role of teaching with excellence and inspiring others to improve their practice is beginning to have an impact on the quality of teaching. However, middle leadership is not as well developed. This is because many of the middle leaders are new to their roles. You have rightly identified the need to invest more time to develop this level of leadership at the school.

The shared guiding vision of 'reach for the stars' sits at the heart of the school's culture. Aspirations are high and pupils know that they are expected to work hard to achieve their best. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and attach great value to the 'one big family' ethos that they feel the school has. Those that spoke to me at the start of the inspection told me that they think the staff are an 'amazing team' and are very glad that their children attend the school.

During the inspection, I was impressed with the levels of engagement with learning I saw in classrooms. Expectations are high and pupils understand very well what is expected of them. Older pupils in particular were happy to explain to me what aspects of their learning they enjoy the best. They particularly like the renewed emphasis on reading and the new reading books that have been bought to stock class and whole-school libraries.

Younger pupils from the early years and key stage 1 were also enjoying their lessons, as well as an opportunity to make music together in their singing assembly, run by a specialist music teacher. In classrooms, pupils in Year 1 were keen to tell me about how hard they were working. One told me that her mathematics work was 'a bit hard'. When I asked why, she replied, 'because you don't know the answer to begin with. It's a bit tricky when you start'.

During the inspection, the behaviour of pupils was exceptionally good. They were polite to each other and respectful to adults. They told me that they enjoy the wide range of topics they study and particularly the whole-school celebrations at the end of each term, when they share their learning with other classes. Pupils also told me that they feel safe in school and that there is no bullying. When I questioned the role of the school's 'bullying ambassadors', I was emphatically told, 'they just help resolve disputes. We don't have bullies'. One pupil told me that she is very happy about how tolerant and accepting of people from other cultures or with different religions her new friends are. On joining the school, she was treated with kindness and now considers herself very much part of the family.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including the stimulating curriculum, outstanding care, support and guidance for pupils, and decisive action of leaders to improve the school. They also identified a need to raise achievement, consolidate the leadership and management of the school and improve the outside area in the early years. Leaders have addressed these matters effectively so that:

- pupils of all abilities are challenged appropriately, so that most of them make good or better progress as they move through the school
- leaders at all levels, including middle leaders, play a full part in self-evaluation and school improvement
- children in the Reception Year benefit from a stimulating and engaging learning environment, both in and outside the classroom.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation in order to identify the key priorities to improve the school. You were able to explain the many strengths of the school, as well as areas that still need to be developed, for example, the need to further refine the school's new system for tracking the progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety of children is given priority. Leaders and governors have ensured that the culture throughout the school gives the protection of children and their day-to-day safety a high importance. Staff training is up to date, including that for first aiders and those with responsibility for recruiting staff, and safeguarding training is at an appropriate level.

Parents told me that they feel their children are safe at school. Pupils are aware of the potential dangers around them, both in and outside the school. Pupils also told me that they feel safe and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- You lead the school very well and have the deep respect of pupils, parents and staff alike. Self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas that still need to be developed is credible and honest. Improvement planning enables leaders and governors to monitor the school's progress effectively.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and allowed to focus on their particular strengths in order to improve the school. The school's new system to track pupils' progress is a good example of this, as is the introduction of the new role of leader of learning.
- Governors are committed and know the school well. They have a broad range of experience outside education and use their wider knowledge and skills in order to carry out their roles effectively. They realise that their understanding of the school's new assessment system needs to develop further in order for them to be more effective at holding school leaders to account in the future.
- Children do very well in the early years and make good progress from their different starting points. The school recently took over the running of the on-site nursery and this has already had a positive impact on the development of the children who attend, most of whom are well prepared for their move into Reception later this year.
- The school's provision for phonics is good. Most pupils who don't meet the expected standard in Year 1 catch up by the end of Year 2. All pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds met the expected standard in Year 1 last year.
- Outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are above national averages at the end of key stage 1. Most pupils make good progress in key stage 2, where outcomes are also above national averages at the end of Year 6, significantly so in writing and English grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Although the majority of pupils make good progress in key stage 2, the progress of some pupils who achieved at higher levels at the end of key stage 1 was not as good in reading as it was in writing and mathematics last year. School leaders have addressed this issue effectively, but continue to monitor the progress of current pupils closely.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability and those from disadvantaged backgrounds make good progress from their different starting points.

- Pupils behave well and have good attitudes to learning because teachers provide them with engaging learning opportunities. Pupils enjoy coming to school and most attend well. The school monitors and supports pupils whose absence is a concern very well.
- The involvement of the local authority and the diocesan board of education has been 'light touch' in nature due to the obvious strengths in leadership at the school. Because of the local authority's confidence in the strengths in leadership, the headteacher is currently supporting another local school on a part-time basis.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the new system for monitoring the progress and attainment of pupils is further developed and refined in order for school leaders, governors and teaching staff to fully utilise it as a tool for school improvement
- middle leaders are supported appropriately so that they quickly become as effective as possible in their roles.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Chichester and the director of children's services for East Sussex. 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, other school leaders, a group of pupils, and the chair of the governing body accompanied by five other governors. I spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. Senior leaders accompanied me as I visited all classrooms, talking to pupils about their learning and looking at the quality of their work. I also attended an assembly. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. I spoke to parents at the beginning and end of the day and took into account the 78 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 48 free-text responses from parents. I took into account the views of staff, including 24 responses to their online questionnaire. I analysed a wide range of documentation, including information about the progress and achievements of pupils, your own self-evaluation, the school development plan, minutes of governors' meetings and a recent record of a visit by the local authority. I also checked the safeguarding policy, records and procedures.