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Sally Quirk  
Headteacher  
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Dear Sally Quirk

**Short inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School, Sevenoaks**

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 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 2012.

**This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has improved further the good quality of education in the school seen at the last inspection. You, your staff and governors have a clear vision for the school that promotes the achievement of every pupil within a caring community based on Christian values. There is a strong culture of nurturing and support, combined with high expectations. Pupils learn in a happy, calm, friendly atmosphere. They are keen to help one another and strong relationships throughout the school build trust and confidence. The school roll has increased rapidly in recent years and new arrivals are warmly welcomed and settle quickly. For example, children in the Reception Year were working and playing together calmly and happily, although it was only their second full day in school.

Staff are fully supportive of the direction you have set for your school. A large majority of parents are also highly positive about the school and appreciate the teaching, care and support their children receive. In addition, both pupils and parents identified how much pupils benefit from the wide range of opportunities that the school offers. In particular, they highlighted the quality and range of sporting activities and clubs as well as the rich provision for music throughout the school. The extraordinary extra-curricular programme supports learning really well, for example through reading clubs and a vast array of science trips, including an overnight stay in the Science Museum.

You have tackled the areas for improvement from the last inspection successfully. A

combination of recruitment of high calibre staff and effective professional development has significantly improved the quality of middle and senior leadership. Leadership of the school at all levels is now strong. Your collective determination to drive further improvement, promote innovation and to provide staff with appropriate support and challenge is evident. Senior and middle leaders show passion, subject expertise and are successful in addressing areas for improvement. Actions taken by school leaders have significantly improved pupils' achievement in mathematics and science since the last inspection. Leaders' emphasis on improving reading during the last academic year has also been successful. Leaders and governors are now showing the same determined approach to raising the standard of writing further. Raising standards in writing across the school and reading for the most able are, rightly, priorities in your school improvement plan. However, these improvement plans do not show precisely what you are setting out to achieve and this limits how well leaders and governors will be able to evaluate how successful the actions taken have been.

The early years foundation stage leader ensures that children make a strong start in early years. More children than is typical nationally attain a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Highly effective teaching means that current pupils progress well through key stage 1. Your systematic approach to improving mathematics has led to sustained good progress across key stage 2. During the last couple of years you have introduced a new way to teach reading which has led to greater consistency and improved outcomes by the end of key stage 2. Your own self-evaluation identifies that achievement in writing is not as strong. Evidence in pupils' books shows early successful impact of the steps you are taking to raise the standard of writing across the school.

In their quest for improvement, leaders research carefully and draw on best practice nationally and locally. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for mathematics has developed expertise within the school, which is now going to be used in the training of student teachers in the region. Another example of innovation is the school's work to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils. The inclusion leader set out to identify barriers to learning and created a profile for each disadvantaged pupil. Pupil premium funding is now used to support high quality interventions designed to meet pupils' needs. This includes play therapy, working with families, funding of enrichment trips, and improving attendance at clubs as well as providing additional learning support. A range of assessments show accelerating progress by disadvantaged pupils across the curriculum, including the most able, most strongly in mathematics and reading.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. You are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe at all times and that a culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training. Staff know pupils very well and they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly. They ensure they seek the right advice from other agencies when

necessary. The parent support advisor works effectively with families and children experiencing difficulties. Parents, staff and pupils are united in their view that pupils are safe in school. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn to keep themselves safe, including online safety. Pupils are confident that any concerns about bullying will be followed up rapidly and effectively.

## Inspection findings

- There is a very strong and consistent focus on Christian values. Pupils show respect for others and work well together. Diversity is celebrated and all members of the community are equally valued, cared for and supported. Parents of different faiths visit the school to help pupils gain an understanding of their beliefs.
- Governors share your commitment to the school and the quality of governance has improved since the last inspection. Governors provide good support as well as the healthy degree of challenge required of all governing bodies. There is a wide range of skills within the governing body and governors willingly participate in training to improve their effectiveness. Visits are frequent so governors can monitor actions taken and they have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- During our visits to classrooms to observe learning, you explained clearly the steps taken to develop staff and improve the quality of their practice. This, and other activities, showed me that you accurately identify strengths and areas for development, provide high quality training and hold staff to account robustly.
- Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning. They know what is expected of their learning and behaviour. They gain confidence in a nurturing environment with high expectations and, as a result, are well prepared academically and socially for their next steps in education. We saw children in the early years and pupils in all other years responding well to adults' encouraging approach.
- The teaching I saw across the school was purposeful and clear. Work was set to meet the different needs of pupils. Teaching assistants were also seen to be challenging and supporting pupils to learn for themselves effectively. Work in books shows that pupils are progressing well, including disadvantaged pupils. The most able pupils were responding well to appropriate challenge, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Since the last inspection, you identified mathematics as an area for improvement. You addressed this by appointing a deputy headteacher with subject expertise in mathematics. She energetically introduced a curriculum which helps pupils develop their fluency in mathematics and solve problems. During our visit to classrooms, pupils were using apparatus appropriately and confidently and working well in groups to tackle challenging questions. Pupils across the school are able to explain their reasoning. As a result, outcomes in mathematics have improved significantly since the last inspection.

- Leaders are determined to improve progress in writing. They prioritised the development of reading last year, as the first step to tackling underperformance in writing. Children and younger pupils make a strong start to acquiring the skills needed to read well. Last year, unvalidated data shows that all pupils in Year 1 met the phonics check and that, at the end of key stage 2, progress in reading is above national levels.
- Work in books shows creativity, stamina and enjoyment. These improvements are helping to further raise the standard of written work. However, guidance by teachers does not consistently explain to pupils precisely how to improve their work. Sometimes feedback is insufficiently challenging.
- Learning in science is another strength of the school. The science leader's determination to provide a stimulating and challenging curriculum has transformed science teaching and learning. Work in books shows a wide coverage of topics and investigations. Pupils from Years 2 to 6 could draw on prior knowledge to explain their observations accurately. In addition, an extensive programme of enrichment activities builds on pupils' interests.
- The inclusion leader tracks the progress of vulnerable pupils carefully. She led an imaginative and research based approach to improving provision for disadvantaged pupils so that the differences between their progress and others nationally are diminishing. Governors have effectively challenged leaders to make better use of pupil premium funding.
- Governors show a detailed knowledge of the performance of pupils at the school. However, they acknowledge they do not ensure that school leaders monitor and evaluate the progress of all groups of pupils, including the most able, against precise and aspirational targets.
- School leaders are justifiably proud of the considerable improvements they have led at the school since the last inspection, particularly in mathematics. The school is not outstanding because the steps they have taken have not yet delivered substantial and sustained progress throughout each year group and right across the curriculum. Strengths in leadership and staffing throughout the school indicate good capacity for further improvement.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement planning sets precise success criteria to strengthen the evaluation of the impact of actions taken on pupils' progress
- all groups of pupils make accelerated progress, particularly in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I visited lessons in all year groups in the school, jointly with the Headteacher and deputy headteacher. I spoke with pupils during playtime and looked at some of their work. I met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, middle leaders and 4 governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I considered the 25 responses from members of staff and 85 from pupils to their confidential online questionnaires. I took careful account of 71 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and conversations with parents waiting to collect their children from school. I looked at documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information about pupils' learning and progress, minutes of meetings and records regarding safeguarding and attendance.

These inspection activities were employed to gather against the following lines of enquiry arising from pre-inspection analysis.

- How well are disadvantaged pupils progressing, including the most able?
- Is work challenging enough throughout key stage 2?
- How effective is the teaching of writing?
- How well are middle leaders driving improvements at the school?