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Deby Day
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Dear Mrs Day

Short inspection of Guston Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 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 maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and recognise areas where performance can be further improved. Your reflective and determined drive has led to continual improvement.

You are acutely aware of the unusual context in which the school works. A high proportion of pupils that attend the school are from families where one or more parents serve in the Armed Forces. Consequently, the number of pupils of various ages that arrive or leave mid-way through the school year is exceptionally high. Despite this, there is no hint of excuses. Instead, your focus is on how you are tackling and successfully overcoming the challenges that this poses.

With the support of other leaders and staff, you have successfully addressed the areas for improvement that arose from the previous inspection. The standard of writing in the books of both boys and girls provided clear evidence that their progress in writing is accelerating. Pupils develop and use an increasingly rich vocabulary. In the oldest class, pupils organise and sustain their writing well. The most able pupils in particular write with flair, developing a strong and engaging style.

From their particular starting points when they join the school, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This reflects your focus on giving

pupils a strong grounding in the basic skills that will prepare them well for the next stage of their education, whenever and wherever that may be. The curriculum provides pupils with a broad range of learning opportunities across other subjects, leading to good progress overall. However, you acknowledge that securing a consistently high quality across subjects is an important next step for the school.

Pupils that I spoke to said that they enjoy school. Pupils' behaviour and engagement in the lessons I visited reflected the positive picture that they described. Most pupils attend regularly. Where pupils are regularly absent, you and your team are tenacious in pursuing this and breaking down any barriers to good attendance. Your inclusion manager could demonstrate the considerable improvements that have been made as a result of the actions of your team. However, partly due to the transient nature of your population, new concerns frequently arise. Consequently, although now largely affecting different pupils, the proportion of pupils that are regularly absent is still running high.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Effective safeguarding training means that staff are vigilant, know what to look out for and follow the school's effective processes for raising concerns. Record-keeping is systematic and precise, with actions taken in response to concerns clearly documented. All statutory checks on adults are made and recorded on the single central register. Pupils report that they feel safe and that any bullying is rare and dealt with well. The 'E-safety ambassadors' are proud of their role in helping all pupils understand how to keep safe online.

Working with others to safeguard children has a high priority at this school. With other leaders, you rightly see working closely with parents as a key part of keeping children safe. A number of parents that added comments when completing Parent View or speaking informally with me praised what you all call the 'open door policy'. As one put it: 'The headteacher always makes time to listen to parents or children.' With your team, you have also cultivated strong links with other professionals and agencies to promote pupils' welfare and safety. Forward planning for changes of whole battalions is part of your successful and smooth transition processes. Parents and pupils commented about how quickly and effectively new arrivals settle in and become a seamless part of the school community.

Inspection findings

- You have sustained and built on pupils' good outcomes since the previous inspection. Pupils are well prepared for their secondary education. A broadly similar proportion of most-able pupils as seen nationally reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children settle quickly into the Reception class and make a swift start in the language-rich environment created by purposeful interactions with adults. Children catch up quickly from often lower starting points to be ready for the rigours of Year 1.

- The systematic teaching of phonics has strengthened significantly since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has shown a strongly improving trend to well above the national average. Lower-ability pupils draw readily on their phonics knowledge to tackle unfamiliar words.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to reading. The most able pupils read confidently and fluently. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors.
- Numbers of disadvantaged pupils are low overall, and exceptionally low in individual cohorts. Across many measures in the past, they have performed in line with or better than other pupils nationally by the end of Year 6. Crucially, they have typically reached at least age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics, putting them on an even footing with other pupils nationally as they start their secondary education.
- The most able pupils make similarly good progress as others in school. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress overall and do especially well in mathematics. Lower-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs are effectively supported; for example, rehearsing sentences out loud to support them to write accurately.
- Lessons are purposeful and productive. Teachers' skilful questioning develops and extends pupils' learning. Teaching assistants are deployed carefully and understand the particular needs and individual next steps for the pupils that they support.
- Teachers expect pupils to do well. They encourage them to think carefully about their work and take a pride in what they produce. However, you recognise that expectations are not high enough across all classes and subjects to secure the best possible outcomes for all pupils, including the most able.
- Governors use a broad range of information to support and challenge school leaders to secure further improvement. Recommendations from the local authority advisers have helped steer the work of leaders. The governing body uses these reports effectively to pose pertinent questions.
- Leaders use additional funding thoughtfully, including pupil premium and funding for services children. Additional support targets the pastoral and academic needs of pupils, whatever their starting points. You have provided individual and small-group tuition to both the most able disadvantaged pupils and those that need help to catch up with their peers.
- Parents that spoke with me or completed the online survey Parent View were overwhelmingly positive about the school. A number particularly praised the school's success in meeting the particular academic, emotional or social needs of their children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- expectations of all pupils are consistently high enough, especially for the most able pupils, and including disadvantaged pupils that have the potential to do as well as the most able pupils
- pupils make strong and sustained progress across a range of subjects
- they sustain actions to reduce the number of pupils that are frequently absent to bring proportions at least in line with national averages.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Canterbury and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, your inclusion manager, your staff and the chair of the governing body. I also spoke on the telephone to a representative of the local authority. You accompanied me as I visited all of the classes. During these visits I talked to pupils about their learning, looked at their work and heard them read. I also reviewed the range of pupils' work across subjects from the sample that you provided. I spoke with parents informally at the start of the day and had informal conversations with pupils at lunchtime. I took account of 12 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire and considered all of the written comments that were added to these, alongside other inspection evidence. There were no returns for the staff and pupil online questionnaires. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records, including some related to safeguarding and your own summary of the school's effectiveness. Through these activities I focused particularly on disadvantaged pupils, the most able, boys' writing, the consistency in the quality of education between subjects, pupils' attendance and safeguarding.