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10 November 2016

Mrs J Dingley
Headteacher
Ardeley St Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Dingley

Short inspection of Ardeley St Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You lead and manage the school well. Through your clear direction, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school noted at the previous inspection. Roles and responsibilities are delegated effectively by you to staff. Teamwork is a very strong feature and all staff play an effective role in whole-school improvement. Teaching and learning are monitored systematically and used to support the effective performance management of teachers. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection.

You work in close partnership with the governing body to implement a shared vision for the school within this rural community. Resources are used efficiently to maintain good levels of staffing, while improving the accommodation, such as the new early years classroom and play area. In partnership with the governing body, you have effectively managed the high levels of pupil mobility experienced traditionally each year, when many pupils transfer to a local middle school at the end of Year 4. The effective promotion of the school's strengths to the wider community has reversed this trend, with higher numbers of pupils in Year 5 this year.

You have sustained the very positive climate for learning that exists within this very small village school, highlighted at the previous inspection. The core British values of tolerance, respect and democracy are promoted effectively through a range of

activities, including a well-planned programme of assemblies. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. School records confirm that bullying or anti-social behaviour is very rare, but, when it does happen, it is dealt with promptly and with sensitivity. Good attitudes towards learning and very positive relationships are quickly established among the children in the early years unit. These positive attributes are exhibited by all pupils in the other two classes. New pupils quickly feel part of this caring school community. For instance, one pupil said 'I feel safe because everybody follows the rules and we are part of one happy family'.

The pupils try hard to do their best with the work set for them in lessons. They are proud of their work, as seen in the care they take with their neat handwriting. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the extra-curricular activities available to them, such as the cooking club and growing vegetables in the school garden.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors ensure that arrangements for the safety and well-being of all pupils are robustly applied and fully meet statutory requirements. Any concerns are followed up quickly and action to protect pupils is taken if required. Regular training in the latest safeguarding requirements and government guidance is given to all staff and governors; for example, training in the government's 'Prevent' duty to counter radicalisation. Records related to the recruitment and vetting of staff are thorough and compliant with statutory regulations. Effective safeguarding is clearly the responsibility of all staff, as demonstrated in the supervision of pupils as they walked across the road to the village hall for lunch.

You and other school leaders with specific responsibility for child protection work closely with other external agencies when any safeguarding and child protection issues arise. Detailed records are kept, related to child protection and welfare of pupils. The progress and well-being of pupils at risk are monitored closely to ensure that their needs are fully met.

Inspection findings

- This is a smaller than average school, where pupil numbers in each year group are very small. Pupil mobility at the end of Year 4 is a major factor in determining how many pupils continue into Year 6. For instance, only three pupils took the end of key stage 2 national tests in 2016. There are no pupils in Year 6 this academic year. Consequently, the analysis of any published test results must be treated with a high degree of caution. However, seven pupils have remained in Year 5 this academic year and the school's future results look bright. Analysis of progress information confirms that pupils make good progress overall. It is best in mathematics, where a trend of improvement is evident since the previous inspection.
- Pupils make good progress in reading. The most able pupils in Year 5 read with fluency and expression. They talk about their favourite authors and why they like the books they read. They use reference books

confidently to locate information using an index. Inspection evidence confirms that less able pupils in Year 2, with adult support, are able to use their knowledge of the sounds that letters make to read unfamiliar words. However, leaders have rightly identified that strengthening the teaching of phonics is a priority for school improvement this year because it is not good enough in key stage 1. As a result, the latest results in the Year 1 phonics screening check are average and do not reflect the above-average achievement in communication and language achieved at the end of the Reception Year in 2016.

- Progress in writing is good. Pupils are developing a neat, cursive handwriting style. Pupils' punctuation and spelling are mostly accurate. Regular marking and feedback by teachers are of high quality and in line with the school's policy. Feedback is used effectively by staff to accelerate the pupils' achievement in writing. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are taught effectively to pupils in the key stage 2 class.
- Regular assessment activity is used well to track the progress of individual pupils. The effective teaching of pupils in ability groups ensures that activities are planned that meet the individual needs of all pupils. Harder work is planned for those who are more- or most-able and, as a result, they make good progress in writing and mathematics. Pupils are provided with further levels of challenge and enrichment through 'themed' days; such those for science and music.
- A wide range of strategies are used well to target support for disadvantaged pupils, using the additional government funding known as the pupil premium to accelerate their progress. This support is effectively reducing differences in their achievement compared with other pupils nationally. The special needs coordinator regularly monitors the progress of less able pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She uses progress information well to manage classroom support to ensure that these pupils achieve well. Analysis of progress information and scrutiny of pupils' work confirms that these pupils make good progress.
- Governors play an important role in monitoring the school's work. For example, their audit of safeguarding at the school is very comprehensive and thorough. Governors undertake regular focused visits, linked closely to the priorities in the improvement plan. These visits include meetings with subject leaders to gain a deeper insight into actions taken and any issues that might be preventing further improvements.
- School leaders have worked closely with families of pupils who are regularly absent from school. Pupils are keen to come to school and attendance has improved. It is now in line with the national average. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics is consistently good or better across the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of St Albans, the director of children's services for Hertfordshire and the regional schools commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I reviewed a wide range of school documentation including that on the school's website. I jointly observed the teaching of phonics and literacy skills in all classes with the headteacher. Together we reviewed the quality of writing of pupils from the key stage 2 class. I met with the headteacher to discuss the safeguarding of pupils and school improvement. A sample of pupils from Year 2 and Year 5 were heard reading. Further meetings were held with the special educational needs coordinator and subject leader for English. I also met with the chair of the governing body and four other governors and a school improvement officer from the local authority. A review of the school's safeguarding arrangements was completed. I met with a number of parents at the school gate and reviewed 38 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 10 free text messages. There were 11 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

I chose to review five key lines of enquiry during this inspection. This included the school's use of self-evaluation, the use of the additional funding that the school receives for disadvantaged pupils, the teaching and progress in phonics and writing, attendance, and safeguarding.