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10 January 2017

Kristina Dyer  
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Dear Mrs Dyer

### **Short inspection of Selling Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 September 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

You have led the school with a high degree of determination and resolve, and created a strong staff team and sense of community that extends beyond the school. You, supported by the principal and academy leaders, have driven school improvement and kept your eye on what needs to be accomplished. For example, you know that work still needs to be done to raise attainment in writing so that it once again becomes a strength of the school. Commendably, you are ambitious for pupils to grow and blossom both academically and personally, and therefore, pupils develop into well-rounded individuals who are prepared well for their next steps in education and for life outside of school. Thus, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Several parents openly declare how proud they are that their children attend your school. A parent summarised the views of many by simply stating, 'This is a great school and my child has really thrived since starting here. It is a safe, happy and very supportive environment.'

Most pupils enter the school with knowledge, skills and understanding that are broadly typical for children of their age. By the time they leave the school, pupils' achievement is typically higher than the national average. In 2016, more pupils reached the expected standard in all three subjects of reading, writing and mathematics than the national average. Attainment is good because the vast majority of pupils make at least expected progress from their different starting points. You and your staff team are successfully supporting the least able pupils to

make faster progress in all key stages to catch up with their classmates. In recent years, this school has enabled pupils to attain well in key stages 1 and 2. A high proportion of pupils have achieved the highest levels of attainment. However, this year, the proportion of pupils who reached the highest levels of attainment, known as greater depth, by the end of key stages 1 and 2 was lower than the national average. Too few pupils of prior higher- or middle-ability made enough progress to reach greater depth, especially in writing. You are determined to change this. There are encouraging signs that your high expectations and targets for pupils' outcomes in the future will come to fruition. Already, a higher number of pupils are making greater than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics than in the past.

Uncharacteristically, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in writing by the end of key stage 2 fell in 2016. Despite this disappointing outcome, you have faced this weakness head on and with unwavering resolve. You, supported by academy leaders, have made a swift response to addressing this shortfall to ensure that this is not repeated in 2017. For example, you have engaged the support of a local authority school improvement adviser to provide independent advice about standards in writing throughout your school. You have reacted receptively to advice offered to you and implemented important changes as a result. You have utilised the support available throughout the academy to share ideas and validate teachers' judgements about how well pupils are doing. The quality of teaching, and subsequently, evidence in pupils' work shows the upturn in pupils' progress. As a result, the number of pupils on track to reach the expected standard and greater depth has increased, especially in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2. You appreciate that teachers need to use information about how well pupils are doing and information about gaps in their learning to carefully hone in on each pupil's next steps. This is especially true for the oldest pupils. Nonetheless, you are zealous in your determination to help pupils achieve the standards of which they are capable.

Leaders, including governors, are driven to continually improve the school. You are rightly developing the roles of staff to lead subjects and other areas of the school's work. This is important work and needs to continue to develop so that emerging leaders have even more opportunities to support and impact on continued improvement. The training opportunities afforded to staff in order that they develop effective leadership skills are excellent. Subsequently, a significant number flourish and are promoted to leadership roles in other schools.

You know the strengths of the school and what needs to be accomplished to make the school even better. For instance, leaders from all key stages understand that more pupils need to make greater than expected progress to raise the proportion of pupils who achieve greater depth by the time they leave the school. Leaders should continue to stretch the most able pupils and challenge middle-attaining pupils to think more deeply and apply their knowledge in a range of ways, so that they too can reach the highest levels of attainment.

You have propelled improvement since the last inspection. You and your staff,

supported by academy leaders and specialists, have worked diligently to meet the recommendations contained within the previous report. For example, you have worked alongside the academy's early years specialist to furnish the early years environment with stimulating activities to engage and motivate children in all areas of their learning. You have worked hard to make certain that children's learning is personalised so that activities allow them to build on what they already know and can do. Hence, the achievement of children by the end of early years has gone from strength to strength and this year is no exception. More children are exceeding expected standards than ever before. Parents particularly value the opportunity they are given to contribute to their children's education and especially through the online assessment tool used by the school. One parent captured the views of many by writing about their child's experience: 'I couldn't wish for a better foundation for the beginning of their dreams.'

You have worked hard to raise the standard of teaching in the school. As a result, the quality of teaching is consistently good. Most learning is personalised well to the specific needs of pupils, and because of this, pupils are challenged, including the most able. Pupils know that targets help them to improve and are motivated to achieve highly. The contribution made by teaching assistants to pupils' learning is too variable throughout the school. On occasions teaching assistants do not draw out pupils' learning through effective questioning and sometimes they do too much work for pupils. Leaders have recognised that teaching assistants would benefit from additional training and support to help them build the necessary skills needed to support pupils' learning highly effectively. Plans are already in place.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. This is reinforced by a deeply embedded, caring and nurturing environment which focuses on the well-being and safety of pupils. Leaders are acutely aware of their responsibilities to protect pupils and ensure that their practice is in line with current legislation and consistently applied by staff. Leaders record information thoroughly and are committed to responding quickly to concerns.

Thorough checks are made on adults when they work or volunteer at the school. All staff have completed appropriate training according to their responsibilities. This includes training on safeguarding issues, such as extremism and radicalisation, which reflect the most recent statutory guidance and legislation.

Pupils say that they feel safe and are taught how to keep themselves safe through learning how to express opinions, make choices and through self-advocacy. Pupils feel that their opinions matter. Pupils feel listened to and are confident that adults will deal with any issues that may arise. The school council has a good impact on health and safety within the school, writing reports on risk assessments carried out by pupils of each classroom. In addition, they are supported to understand how to use the internet safely and learn important first-aid skills.

## Inspection findings

- You have engendered a culture of high expectations that has permeated through the essence of the school's culture and has had a positive impact on the academic and emotional needs of pupils. Staff have a clear understanding of the goals the school aims to achieve and all staff believe that the school is aspirational for pupils.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They participate well in discussions and are eager to answer questions and work alongside each other. A 'have a go' attitude pervades throughout the school, resulting in a tangible buzz of excitement in each class. Pupils eagerly and proudly discussed their learning with me and were very clear about the importance of challenging themselves to reach the 'A++' standard of work in each subject.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are courteous and thoughtful, demonstrating kind-hearted care and respect for each other. Nearly all parents value the care and nurturing environment that the school fosters and the impact that this has on their children's behaviour and attitudes. One parent wrote: 'The importance of helping, supporting and being kind to others is a priority and this really shows in the attitude and well-being of all the children.' Consequently, pupils exude British values.
- The vast majority of parents speak very positively about all aspects of the school's work. They are particularly positive about how happy their children are, and that their children are safe and cared for well. Written contributions made by parents were brimming with praise for the dedication and hard work of the staff on behalf of their children. For example, one parent wrote fondly about the adults working with her child in early years highlighting that, 'staff always give their best', which has impacted positively on her own experience and that of her child.
- Pupils are taught phonics, highly effectively. Children in the early years told me that two letters that make one sound are called digraphs, and 'ch' could be found in the words chocolate and chick. They persist in blending the sounds that letters make to spell phonically plausible words. Pupils in Year 1 were able to spell words, such as cloud, round and mountain, confidently and accurately, after learning the digraph 'ou'. Year 2 pupils changed verbs into the past tense to write sentences, an example of which was, 'Yesterday, I slept in my comfy, cosy bed.' As a result of effective teaching, most pupils reach the standard expected in the Year 1 phonics screening check. When they do not, pupils are supported throughout Year 2 so that nearly all pupils achieve the expected standard before they enter key stage 2. Commendably, leaders continue to support the very few pupils who find phonics tricky, and where possible, to reach the expected standard during key stage 2.
- Pupils enjoy reading and know that it helps them to improve the vocabulary they use in their writing. They say that reading ignites their imagination. The most able pupils read fluently and grasp meaning and inference swiftly. Consequently, the proportion of pupils that achieve the expected standard in reading has been consistently above the national average.

- Work in books shows the wide range of vocabulary and punctuation used by pupils in their writing. Pupils have secure grammatical knowledge because it is taught well across the school. The most able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, demonstrate that they write for an audience. For example, a Year 4 pupil wrote, 'exclaimed Kelsie strangely' and 'questioned Kelsie anxiously' to describe a character's spoken response.
- Pupils acquire mathematical concepts progressively across the school. The school's consistent approach to mathematics teaching has resulted in more opportunities for pupils to reason and solve problems, especially for the most able pupils. Very occasionally, lower- and middle-attaining pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to apply their learning and solve problems in mathematics to embed and deepen their understanding. Nevertheless, leaders have been proactive in raising pupils' achievement in mathematics to meet the higher expectations of the primary curriculum, and therefore, outcomes are consistently strong. School leaders are skilful in nurturing a love of mathematics even when pupils are reluctant mathematicians. The impact of this is that progress and confidence blossom.
- You have ensured that effective systems are now in place to track pupils' attainment and progress. Leaders use these to assess how well groups of pupils are achieving, including disadvantaged pupils. You are acutely aware of how well the achievement and progress of your pupils compares to schools in the local area and to schools nationally. You hold teachers and additional adults to account for the progress that pupils make. However, leaders know that there is still more work to do to ensure that staff use pupils' performance information highly effectively to ensure that any gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, particularly in writing, are addressed. This challenge is mainly due to the transition from national curriculum levels to assessment without levels. In addition, assessment information could be used even more effectively to target middle-attaining pupils to make greater than expected progress to reach greater depth.
- The most able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs. Evidence in pupils' work shows that learning is tailored to help them think more deeply and apply what they know in a range of ways. Work in books and observations in lessons demonstrate the good progress they make in reading, writing and mathematics. For instance, the most able pupils write at length and use a range of complex sentences, enhanced by rich vocabulary and precise punctuation.
- The proportion of pupils in the school who are disadvantaged is very low compared to the national average. It is therefore difficult to compare the achievement of this group of pupils from one year to the next. Pupil premium funding is carefully allocated and evaluated to measure the difference it is making to the outcomes of this vulnerable group. Leaders target each pupil's individual needs. This bespoke approach ensures that pupils make good progress from their various starting points. However, too few disadvantaged pupils make enough progress to reach the highest levels of attainment in key stages 1 and 2, particularly in writing and mathematics.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well because the special educational needs coordinator knows each pupil's needs in depth. In most instances, additional support provided to pupils makes a positive difference to their well-being, ability to access learning and the progress that they make. Parents are very complimentary overall about the support and guidance that their children receive, one saying of her child that he was 'made to feel proud and excited about his difference'.
- Attendance for the last academic year was just below the national average, despite leaders' hard work to encourage pupils to attend school every day. Pupils told the inspector about the wide range of lessons and activities they enjoy at school and about the positive friendships they have formed. This is because you have worked hard to create an environment in which pupils feel valued and therefore enjoy coming to school. A parent summed up their thoughts about the importance of good attendance by saying, 'I tell my children they attend school to gain the skills to have the opportunity to be whatever they want to be.' Yet, a very small number of pupils take too many days off school. Sometimes this is through no fault of their own. Nonetheless, you have been diligent in your work to support families and seek external advice to find solutions when absence is potentially a barrier to learning.
- The local governance of the school, known as the accountability and standards committee, adds to the capacity of the school to continue its drive towards becoming an outstanding school. School leaders have been instrumental and proactive in seeking challenge and support from governors and ensuring that they are clear about their roles. Governors are undoubtedly able to provide challenge due to the wealth of skills and expertise they bring from their own professional careers. Consequently, the governing body has evolved to become a strategically driven part of the leadership team who share school leaders' ambitions for the pupils in their care. Some governors are new to their roles and feel well supported to undertake their responsibilities.
- You have utilised your partnerships with other schools, both within The Village Academy and beyond, to seek ways to improve the school and validate your own self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Through these partnerships, you have also made certain that the school's judgements about how well pupils are achieving is correct. You proactively seek to engage with the local authority to ensure that the school is outward looking and to gain additional insight into the strengths of the school and areas for further improvement. These relationships have facilitated vital support to you as a school leader and for your staff. These positive relationships have had a strong impact on the forward momentum of the school to date.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- increase the proportion of pupils who make more than expected progress, especially middle-attaining pupils, so that even more pupils achieve greater depth by the end of each key stage

- ensure that information about pupils' performance is used highly effectively to plan learning that meets pupils' needs, especially in writing
- continue to provide high-quality support and training for teaching assistants so that they are highly effective and confident to support pupils' learning in a range of subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the accountability and standards committee, the chair of the executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Canterbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Abigail Birch  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, the principal and other leaders, those responsible for safeguarding, members of the governing body and the academy trust. In addition, I met with a local authority improvement adviser who is supporting your school. I visited all classes in the school to observe pupils' learning with you and the principal. I spoke to pupils during lessons, and met with a group of pupils formally to gather their views. No responses were made by pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I looked at their work in a range of subjects alongside subject leaders. I took account of 123 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 15 written contributions made by parents. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I also considered the six responses made through the voluntary staff survey. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about the achievement of pupils, school policies and safeguarding procedures. I also discussed with you and the principal the evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I focused on how effectively leaders, including governors, have continued to improve the school's effectiveness and addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. I paid particular attention to writing because pupils achieved less well in this subject at the end of key stage 2 in 2016. I considered whether pupils, including the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged, make enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics. I focused on early years provision to make certain that children are making a positive start to their education. I also examined how well the school teaches the early stages of reading, because the proportion of pupils who achieved the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check fell in 2016. In addition, I evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding and how well the school supports families of pupils who have too many days off school.