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Mrs Theresa Hobbs
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hobbs

Short inspection of Chilthorne Domer Church School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2017, 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 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, and share, a vision for continuous improvement and are rigorous in the way that you hold staff to account for their performance. Pupils' attitudes to life at Chilthorne are captured accurately in the values that they told me about: 'Stand tall, aim high, love learning'. Staff help them to do just that.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of your self-evaluation, ensuring that criteria were measurable and that monitoring by staff and governors resulted in successful outcomes. You were also asked to improve teaching and learning to accelerate pupils' progress and improve challenge for the most able pupils.

You have successfully tackled each of these issues. Expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve have risen and rates of progress have improved, particularly in mathematics. Pupils now have many varied and stimulating opportunities to write in different styles. Effective teaching helps pupils to develop a wide vocabulary and a good understanding of grammar and punctuation. A focus this year on improving writing has had an extremely positive impact. The quality of presentation seen in books and on wall displays shows that pupils have a real pride in their work.

However, you acknowledge that it is now time to expand this quality of learning into other areas of the curriculum. You are aware that this will help deepen the pupils' understanding, especially those who are most able, of other subjects and challenge them to use their skills more widely.

Parents are extremely pleased with the quality of education you provide, particularly the care that their children receive during their time at the school. The vast majority of parents who responded to the online inspection questionnaire, Parent View, said they would recommend the school. Parents spoke highly of the teachers, how 'nothing is too much trouble' for them and how they know all the children well. They said that you and your staff always find time to help them resolve issues. Parents of pupils who had recently transferred to Chilthorne Domer Church School from other schools spoke about the warm reception their children had received and how smooth and well-organised the transition had been. The school is the centre of a learning community in which staff and parents work well together to improve educational outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding pervades the school. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect pupils against possible risks. Pupils feel safe in the school and parents agree that their children are happy and well looked after. Staff know each pupil well and vigilantly spot any child who is troubled, or has behaviour changes, and whether this might indicate a deeper concern. Parents are very aware of this and talk of the 'family' atmosphere of the school and report how 'caring' the staff are.

There were some clerical issues in the safeguarding policy on the school website, but, overall, leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records of child protection and support are appropriately detailed. All staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding and governors hold a close watching brief over procedures.

Inspection findings

- You and your senior leadership team have a very clear focus on improving pupils' academic achievement across all key stages, including in the early years. You have an accurate understanding of the areas that pupils perform well in and those which need further improvement.
- Historically, pupils have tended to perform better in reading and mathematics than in writing. This pattern was repeated in the recent 2016 national curriculum assessments at both key stage 1 and key stage 2. However, work in pupils' books across a range of abilities, including the most able, shows that pupils are making better progress in their writing skills in this current year. In particular, pupils' written work in Years 5 and 6 shows that they have mastered aspects of writing such as complex sentence structure, writing for a purpose and using punctuation to enhance meaning and convey emotion. You understand that it is now time for the pupils to be challenged even further to use their skills in other curriculum

subjects. This will enhance and deepen pupils' learning, especially that of the most able.

- Following the dip in the outcomes of the phonics screening check in 2016, you undertook a review of the teaching of phonics. As a result of research and training, you now use an effective variety of programmes, which staff have agreed upon as 'the Chilthorne way'. Pupils in the early years and Year 1 develop a good understanding of phonics. They are given opportunities to develop their early reading and writing skills well. Although the percentage of pupils who passed the phonics check at the end of Year 1 was below the national average last year, current monitoring information reflects the improvements in teaching and learning in this area. It shows that at present more pupils are in line to pass the screening check than last year.
- As part of the strategy to improve boys' progress, especially in writing and mathematics, you have developed the early years outdoor area to be more boy-friendly and adapted the curriculum across the school to appeal to both boys and girls equally. Clear impact of these actions can be seen in the improved quality of work that pupils, especially boys, are producing. However, children's writing skills are still insufficiently challenged in the early years.
- Leaders have a very clear insight into the needs of every pupil who is eligible for pupil premium and understand any of the barriers to achievement they might face. Differences in outcomes between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils are diminishing and, in some years, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than their peers. The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress in the school. Leaders are aware, though, that there is scope for these pupils to achieve even higher levels, especially in mathematics.
- Attendance for the last academic year was above the national average. Staff keep a close eye on vulnerable pupils who are absent more than others and ensure that there is effective pupil support on their return to school. As a result, the levels of absence have reduced. This is a testament to the successful collaboration between the school's staff and pupils' families.
- Governors' oversight of the strategic direction of the school is extensive. The governing body maintains a careful overview of the work of the school. Governors receive regular reports from the headteacher and other leaders about developments and improvements to pupils' outcomes. Governors take their responsibilities very seriously, challenging and debating fully the information given to them by the headteacher or subject leaders. They keep themselves up to date through training, networking and accessing national information about improving governance. They use their wide-ranging skills to good effect to keep the work of the school under close review. However, governors agree that they have not used the same level of rigour in overseeing the accuracy of documents on the school website and how it presents information to the parents.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the early years provision for writing and language development is developed further to give the children an even better start for reading and writing when they start school
- the curriculum is developed to provide even greater challenge for pupils, especially the most able
- all statutory duties are met regarding the updating and publishing of information on the school website.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Terry Mortimer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and members of staff. I met with four members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke with a representative from the local authority. I considered the responses from 32 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We visited all the classrooms together to observe and speak with pupils about their learning. I also scrutinised pupils' writing, mathematics work and English books from three classes. I considered a wide range of documentation and information relating to your self-evaluation, school improvement planning, equalities, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and safeguarding.

The key lines of enquiry during the short inspection day were:

- the effectiveness of leadership and management in ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning provides effective challenge in key stages 1 and 2, especially for middle and high attainers
- the effectiveness of phonics teaching in improving pupils' skills in reading, writing and spelling, especially for boys
- how leaders ensure that pupils achieve well in writing and mathematics
- whether leaders have ensured that the website gives parents correct information and is statutorily compliant
- how well disadvantaged pupils make progress
- how effectively the school keeps the pupils safe.