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Miss Charlotte Hill
Head of School
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Dear Miss Hill

Short inspection of Sidbury Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 July 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your school is a happy place where pupils chatter down 'the slope' and across the playground in high spirits, smiling and excited about the day ahead. Parents, staff and pupils used the words, 'caring' and 'partnership' to describe the sense of togetherness evident at Sidbury. Everyone reported that pupils work and play together well in a supportive environment. The school is highly regarded and popular within the local community, as reflected by the high number of applications for school places and increasing number of pupils on roll.

Your approach to developing the conditions that enable effective learning to take place is evident from first entering the school. Adults encourage pupils to respect each other and to play their part as responsible members of the wider community. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and are naturally at ease with their peers. Your strong focus on developing pupils' learning behaviours is proving successful. Pupils are adept at reviewing their own learning and setting their own goals and challenges. As a result, they are clear about their next steps on their personal learning journey. Your aims and school values lie at the heart of your approach and underpin the actions of those who work and learn at Sidbury. Your mantra of 'Together Everyone Achieves More', or T.E.A.M, permeates all you do. It is reflected in the way adults and pupils act, talk and work with each other and has a strong impact on pupils' academic learning and personal development across the school.

Changes to leadership and governance have undoubtedly left your school in a much

stronger position than in 2012. Your middle leaders play an increasingly influential and important part in securing school improvement. Weak performance has been robustly tackled. Governors are deeply involved in monitoring the school's performance and continually challenge you for further improvements. You and your team are moving forward confidently in pursuit of consistency in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. You are drawing well on the wide variety of support networks and training available from the Ventrus Multi-Academy Trust. Research is used to hone and refine teaching well so that the unique needs of each cohort can be fully met. All those spoken to during the inspection understand the collective goals you are striving to achieve and the part they play in that process.

Pupils typically leave Year 6 with standards that are above average in reading, writing, and spelling, punctuation and grammar. You, your staff and governors have worked hard to improve mathematics this academic year following a dip in the 2016 results and your efforts are proving effective; pupils' progress is improving quickly. Disadvantaged pupils, though small in number, achieve well. Their attainment compares favourably with pupils from non-disadvantaged backgrounds. You are working hard to help some boys perform better in their writing and overcome behavioural and emotional barriers to their learning. There is clear and tangible evidence of the success of your collective initiatives and actions.

Safeguarding is effective.

Everyone involved in the school community is deeply committed to keeping pupils safe. You make sure that all necessary checks are made to confirm that those who wish to work with children are suitable to do so. Training for safeguarding and child protection is up to date and regular, enabling staff and governors to fully discharge their duties. You report back frequently to the full governing body. You ensure that more than the minimum required number of staff are trained, illustrating your deep commitment to this aspect of the school's work. Pupils and parents are confident that issues are followed up. Pupils are knowledgeable about matters of safety and well-being through activities planned in the curriculum. For example, your new kitchen chef is playing a prominent part in developing pupils' understanding of healthy eating and how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Your strong emphasis on pupils' personal development promotes their positive behaviour, with respect and courtesy as the norm. De-escalation strategies are promoted through your anti-bullying and behaviour approaches. Effective links are made with outside agencies to cater for all vulnerable pupils' needs. All staff are aware of the procedures for passing on concerns. The way you report back to adults following referrals ensures that all are aware and happy that actions are appropriate and completed adequately. Your strong commitment to pupils' safety is demonstrated through your work to recently update all staff induction procedures, ensuring that all are fully versed in the school's safeguarding methods and procedures. Your engagement with staff, pupils, parents and governors significantly enhances the school's culture of safeguarding children. Overall, the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and of a high quality.

Inspection findings

- Together, we focused on how well girls were being supported to achieve as well as they could in mathematics. We also examined how well boys were being challenged to improve their writing. In addition, we explored how well the teaching of early reading and phonics is helping younger disadvantaged pupils reach the standards expected for their age. Finally, we examined how well the most able pupils in Years 3 to 5 are being stretched to reach the highest standards.
- Your governors questioned why standards in mathematics did not match those achieved in other subject areas in 2016. Your subject leader responded by conducting a thorough review of mathematics. Training from external sources, additional resources and checks with other schools across the trust are developing teachers' practice and subject knowledge further. Your mathematics leader has a firm handle on what needs further development, such as the curriculum and the teaching of pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- Training and a new approach to developing pupils' mathematics skills are bearing fruit overall. On our learning walk, we particularly noted girls' readiness to think more deeply and explain their understanding. For example, Year 6 pupils were keen to explain their understanding of the relationship between different units of measurement. Pupils were less confidently tackling questions that challenge assumptions such as '6 divided by $\frac{1}{2} = 3$ ' and provided a deeper explanation of why this mistake is often made. From looking at work in pupils' books, it was seen that this type of questioning is beginning to be a more consistent feature of everyday mathematics work.
- Our joint scrutiny of books pointed to some minor variation in practice across the school. Girls in the Year 1 and 2 class build on their skills well. Bright and engaging activities are promoting pupils' enthusiasm for mathematics. Precise questioning to check pupils' conceptual and procedural knowledge is helping younger pupils overcome barriers to learning and to make good progress. Older pupils cover a much broader range of activities and topics. Occasionally, they are moved on to a new concept without securely grasping the one they are studying.
- Your adaptations to the curriculum across Years 3 to 6 are engaging boys more in their writing and helping them make good progress. Parents recognise these positive changes. Boys' interest is enthused when activities link closely to wider trips such as to Grenville House or Plymouth Aquarium. Older pupils talk knowledgeably about their approach to checking their writing successes and what they still find challenging, such as using subordinate clauses. The practical approaches you follow, with a strong focus on pupils' language development, are proving successful. Just occasionally, activities do not meet their needs closely enough.
- The teaching of writing is providing a clear structure for developing pupils' understanding of the purpose, organisation and features of different genres. Pupils use their good knowledge to create clear writing for a range of purposes. For example, when crafting diary entries about their residential trip to London.

When the purpose and organisation of a text is taught alongside the technical aspects of writing composition, spelling and grammar, pupils' progress is rapid. The teaching of writing encourages pupils to use these grammatical and spelling conventions in their independent writing, or when writing in other subjects. Consequently, boys' progress, and that of all pupils, is good.

- Your belief that all pupils will achieve well is deeply embedded in your collective vision and efforts of what you all want to achieve as a school. Your approach to the curriculum for writing, for example, is benefiting all pupils but especially disadvantaged pupils. Teaching is typically characterised by high expectations, strong relationships with pupils and happy, productive classroom environments. The observations we made and the pupils' books we reviewed show that disadvantaged pupils are making strong gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They are learning to be even more resilient when faced with trickier tasks and to be more reflective about what they have learned. These skills will serve them well as lifelong learners.
- On our learning walk, we noted Year 1 pupils' accuracy in their knowledge of phonics. Teachers and other adults are technically precise with their delivery – helping pupils confidently segment and blend sounds, such as the split digraph 'e-e', to decode words. Such approaches are ensuring that pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check, including that of disadvantaged pupils, is rising. Those who did not meet the standard in previous years receive additional support and are catching up with their peers rapidly. Therefore, the firm foundations on which to build pupils' future success in reading are being secured.
- You are working hard to continually stretch and challenge the most able pupils. In 2016, an above-average proportion of the most able pupils reached the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Additional experiences such as gifted and talented days supplement the daily work in classes well. Teachers identify the most able pupils for challenges to enrich and develop their use of reasoning in mathematics. Your links with other schools across the trust enable the most able to meet for joint activities and discuss and debate key ideas and concepts. You are aware of the need to ensure that more children learn 'greater depth' and above the expected standard for their age as they move through the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum for mathematics includes more activities for pupils to practise and improve their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills
- the quality of boys' writing is improved further by ensuring that activities meet their learning needs more precisely
- challenge for the most able pupils is sustained and established as routine practice in day-to-day lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the executive headteacher, and leaders for English and mathematics, special educational needs and the early years. Three members of the governing body, including the chair, met the inspector to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was held with the chief executive officer of the Ventrus Multi-Academy Trust. The views of a number of parents were gathered while they attended a 'Rock up and Read' session. Visits to most classrooms were conducted jointly with you to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, review the quality of pupils' writing over time, listen to pupils read and talk informally about their experiences of school. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance. The inspector met with a group of pupils from Year 6.