

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Miss Alexandra Symondson
Executive Headteacher
Swell Church of England Primary School
Lower Swell
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL54 1LH

Dear Miss Symondson

Short inspection of Swell Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your appointment in September 2016, you have quickly identified the right priorities to improve teaching and learning. You are working effectively with other leaders and governors to raise expectations of what the pupils can achieve. Pupils, staff and parents recognise the improvements and speak positively of the galvanising impact that they are having.

You and other leaders are continuing to build on previous strengths of the school to ensure that there is a welcoming, friendly and inclusive culture. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are keen to learn. You are determined for the pupils to succeed and are not complacent or accepting of excuses. You are unflinching in holding teachers firmly to account for standards, which is central to the strong improvements seen. Teachers understand your expectations and are being effectively supported to meet these through focused training and other professional development opportunities. Consequently, teaching is good and continuing to be improved further. This is ensuring that pupils are well poised to meet and exceed national expectations in tests.

Since the last inspection, Swell Church of England Primary has federated with two local primary schools working under one governing body in the North Cotswolds Schools Federation. This took effect from September 2016. As a result, leadership has been strengthened because it is using the wider pool of leadership talent from across the federation, including for the role of subject leaders. Furthermore, the

appointment of the new senior teacher has helped you to improve teaching and learning. Together, you have formed an effective partnership with clear aims, vision and purpose which are well communicated and understood by staff and pupils.

Governors provide robust challenge and visit the school to meet with yourself and other leaders to hold you to account. They have completed further training themselves, for example in understanding school performance data, which has sharpened their focus for school improvement. Governors have an accurate and honest self-evaluation which informs their decision-making appropriately. As a consequence, you and the governing body recognise that there are still some key challenges remaining for the school. These include continuing to raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1, and ensuring that outcomes in the early years and phonics improve. In 2016, the school did not meet the national standards in these areas and thus they are rightly targeted for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and leaders have a strong determination and focus on protecting children and keeping them safe. In January 2017, the governing body conducted an internal safeguarding audit which identified some actions to improve safeguarding. They have responded fastidiously to the findings. This included improving how records are held. As a result, you and other leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of a high quality. The audit also identified the need to publicise the school's lead safeguarding officers for the children, and now this information is displayed in public corridors and each classroom.

Pupils talk with confidence about how to stay safe, including the youngest children. For example, they understand fully about online safety and know precisely the kinds of information that they should withhold about themselves. Staff ensure that pupils are kept safe and all have been trained fully in child protection. As a result, staff are observant and take an active role in contributing to the record-keeping and monitoring systems. Indeed, there are examples when the information from non-teaching staff has been instrumental in instigating actions to protect pupils. You work well with other professionals to keep children safe. Pupils report that they are happy at school and that there is no bullying or anti-social behaviour. You are also working effectively with others, including the education welfare officer and parent support adviser, to improve attendance, especially for those few pupils with persistently high absence.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on the quality of teaching and checking the progress made by pupils, especially in mathematics in key stage 2 and across all subjects in key stage 1. Even though the very small cohorts make comparisons difficult, the attainment of pupils in these areas was below the national figure in 2016. Workbooks show that pupils are catching up quickly. The appointment of

the new Year 5/6 teacher is particularly effective in raising expectations and improving outcomes. There is now a significantly increased proportion of pupils making strong progress to meeting the standards expected of them, with some of the most able pupils on track to exceed these. Year 6 pupils confirm this. With regard to mathematics, they commented that they now understand key topics, including 'fractions, angles and algebra'. The mathematics subject leader completed an analysis of past national test papers which led to a focus on improving pupils' reasoning and thinking skills. Similarly, in key stage 1, additional professional training, moderation with other schools and improved use of assessment are all contributing to teaching that is well matched to pupils' needs.

- My second line of enquiry focused on the teaching of phonics and how well pupils are catching up in Years 2 and 3 who previously had not met the standard in the Year 1 screening check. Following recent training from the local authority, the teaching of phonics is improving. Pupils are enjoying regular phonics sessions that are aimed at increasing their participation and reflect age-related expectations. As a result, teaching is meeting the needs of the pupils and those who were behind are being ably supported to catch up quickly. School leaders and teachers know which pupils are vulnerable and are ensuring that carefully matched activities and support are in place for them. As a result, outcomes are improving well. In addition, Year 1 pupils are also in a strong position to meet the expected standard this year and were observed working with corresponding letters and sounds appropriate for their age. However, some pupils still have difficulty in applying their phonics knowledge in their own free writing.
- My third line of enquiry concentrated on the quality of provision and teaching, especially for writing in the early years. This is because fewer than half the children achieved a good level of development in 2016. Recently, teaching has benefited from targeted input from the federation's early years leader and other high-quality opportunities, such as observing colleagues in other schools. As a result, teaching is making better use of the environment to support the children and more precise use of assessment is being tailored to meet the children's needs. However, you and other leaders agree that writing needs to be developed more effectively as an integral part of the children's day and experiences, especially for boys. We also agreed that the children's understanding and use of letters and sounds needs to be applied more successfully when the children are writing for themselves.
- My fourth line of enquiry focused on the quality and effectiveness of leadership since the previous inspection, in particular the leadership of subject leaders. The most recent federation has ensured much-increased capacity and you are making good use of different leaders from across the schools to improve teaching and learning. You have challenged a previous culture of complacency. In particular, you have increased accountability so that teachers know what is expected of them. This line of enquiry also explored the school's strategies for valuing diversity and equalities. Governors and leaders are proactive in promoting an inclusive culture and pupils also affirmed their view that all pupils are treated equally and have the same opportunities. In addition, governors use the pupil premium grant well to support individual pupils and there is a clear strategy in

place which governors are using to improve outcomes for the few disadvantaged pupils in the school.

- We also discussed the importance of ensuring the same high quality of teaching in all classes, which is something that you are rigorously developing. Teachers are being well trained and offered both support and challenge to improve towards being outstanding. You rightly evaluate teaching in line with pupils' outcomes and have a well-considered series of actions to continue developing teaching and learning across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1
- pupils meet the expectations of the Year 1 phonics screening check and that children in both the early years and key stage 1 are given opportunities to use and apply their phonics skills more widely in writing
- children leave the early years better prepared for key stage 1, particularly in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to agree the timetable and inspection activities for the day. I also worked extensively with you and the senior leader across the whole day. I met with the early years leader to evaluate the impact of strategies to improve outcomes in the early years. In addition, I met briefly with a teacher to evaluate the impact of leadership in supporting and challenging teachers to improve. I scrutinised safeguarding records and discussed a wide range of matters related to safeguarding, including staff recruitment and vetting procedures and recent safeguarding audits. Together, we visited phonics lessons in key stage 1 and also undertook a learning walk to evaluate the effectiveness of provision in the early years. This involved scrutinising a wide range of books and talking at length with different pupils in line with our agreed key lines of enquiry. I also met with representatives of the governing body and reviewed school documents, including

the school's self-evaluation summary and samples of governors' visits. I also spoke with Year 6 pupils and heard Year 2 pupils read. I sought a range of views about safeguarding arrangements across the spectrum of inspection activities. I considered the responses made by parents to Parent View, including 10 responses online and a further three received via text.