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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Katherine Baker
Headteacher
Milstead and Frinsted Church of England Primary School
School Lane
Milstead
Sittingbourne
Kent
ME9 0SJ

Dear Mrs Baker

Short inspection of Milstead and Frinsted Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are ambitious for all the pupils in your school to do well. You are clear-eyed about the areas that require further attention but also rightly proud of the many strengths. You and your staff provide a delightful and welcoming environment for pupils and parents. Above all, you know all the pupils and their families well. Parents describe the school as 'amazing' and say that you and your staff 'go the extra mile' to support pupils to achieve.

Pupils really enjoy coming to school because they experience teaching that helps them progress strongly from their starting points. Pupils do especially well in mathematics and reading at both key stages. Younger pupils get a strong start to their education. Pupils value the extra help they receive from all adults and the many opportunities to learn both inside and outside the classroom. Younger pupils enjoy weekly woodland walks, and older pupils take part in a wide range of sports and other activities. The school is a creative place where parents report that 'there is always something exciting going on'. Above all, leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for the transition to secondary school, with a high proportion gaining places at the local grammar schools.

Leaders across the school, together with the Village Academy Trust, are determined that standards can rise still further. Staff are highly committed and feel well

supported because the systems to help them develop their professional skills are thorough. Staff enjoy the many opportunities across the multi-academy trust to share ideas and learn from other teachers. As a result, staff feel that the school has improved since the previous inspection. There are also robust and regular checks made on the quality of pupils' work by trust leaders. You and the leadership of the trust have recognised that the current system in place for local governance in the school requires further attention. Consequently, there is now a clear plan in place to ensure that governors are better placed to provide a deeper level of challenge and a higher quality of support to leaders.

You have adroitly addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. There are now very good systems in place to support pupils' handwriting and presentation. As a result, the quality of handwriting across the school is now high and presentation is much improved. Teachers assess pupils' work very effectively so that pupils are clear about how well they are doing and what they need to address in the future. Moreover, pupils respond regularly to the advice they receive and commit to improve their work when appropriate. In mathematics, teachers use information about pupils' progress well to plan lessons that stretch those pupils who are more confident than others. However, fewer pupils than expected are working at greater depth in their writing. You recognise that further work is required to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders and governors ensure that records are suitably thorough and recruitment processes are of a high quality. There are a large number of staff who have had specialist training, which is frequently refreshed. All staff receive regular updates about individual children, as well as appropriate training annually. Pupils are confident that staff look after them well. Pupils receive excellent advice on how to manage risks, including road safety and staying safe online. Those vulnerable families who need additional support from time to time receive good advice and guidance. Leaders are especially dogged in their pursuit of the best outcomes for all pupils who need extra help. As a result, parents are universally positive about the help and guidance they receive.

Inspection findings

- The inspection considered how well leaders and teachers develop reading, especially in the early years and Year 1. Leaders, following an extensive review of what works well across the multi-academy trust, have established a new approach to teaching phonics. Pupils practise their spelling and knowledge of phonics every day. As a result, pupils, including those who are working beyond the expectation for their age, are guided very effectively to improve their knowledge. Consequently, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in phonics has increased year on year. Those pupils who need help to catch up receive well-targeted teaching and make good progress. However, a small number of pupils in the early years and Year 1 who have special

educational needs and/or disabilities need further help so that they can gain a secure knowledge of phonics by the end of key stage 1.

- The inspector considered the quality of writing and, in particular, the extent to which pupils write in depth. Leaders have established good systems to support improving writing, including developing pupils' knowledge of more sophisticated vocabulary. Teachers have a good understanding of the expected standards in writing in each key stage. They plan for and assess pupils' work adeptly, using thoughtful and purposeful targets for each year group. As a result, the majority of pupils at all levels are making progress from their starting points. However, a few of the most able pupils are not yet writing at a greater depth. Leaders recognise that there is more work to do to develop teachers' expertise so that pupils receive more opportunities to develop their writing. Currently, not enough are exceeding the expected standard in writing at the end of each key stage. Leaders of the multi-academy trust also acknowledge this and are developing a trust-wide approach to raise the numbers of pupils writing at greater depth.
- During the inspection, I considered the quality of teaching in mathematics. The headteacher and trust leaders have worked well together to support those teachers new to their role or to the profession. Teachers and additional adults are especially skilled in supporting pupils to learn new concepts and ideas, such as fractions and division. Pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, grapple with problems and develop a good understanding of key ideas. Pupils enjoy learning in mathematics because they find it challenging and they have to try hard. Teachers use examples from pupils' daily lives to illustrate key questions. For example, pupils in Year 3 relished tackling a problem about how they would spend a proportion of their pocket money. They are especially helped by teachers ensuring that all pupils gain a good grasp of the basics and checking their understanding of 'key facts' regularly.
- The inspection considered the quality of the support for vulnerable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Leaders and governors keep a close eye on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who achieve less well. They have introduced a new approach to check regularly the progress of these pupils. Consequently, those pupils who fall behind receive well-targeted and urgent support to help them catch up quickly. In many cases, disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as, if not better than, their peers. Leaders have also taken urgent action to support some families with pupils' attendance. The school's systems to tackle absence and lateness are very effective. Staff are in regular communication with families who need extra care and attention. As a result, attendance for all, including disadvantaged pupils, is now above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers receive appropriate training and guidance to support more pupils to write at a greater depth, especially those who are most able

- those pupils in the early years and key stage 1 who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive further help with their reading so that they make accelerated progress to achieve the expected standards by the end of key stage 1.

I am copying this letter to 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

Seamus Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited the school for one day. I met with you, your leaders, staff and members of the local committee, as well as speaking with representatives of the multi-academy trust. Policies on safeguarding, your own evaluation of the school's work and other documents were scrutinised. I visited all year groups to see teaching and learning. Together with leaders, I looked at pupils' work in lessons, as well as a selection of most-able and disadvantaged pupils' writing books from Years 2, 5 and 6. I also had informal meetings with pupils. The 32 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, the six responses from staff and the 11 responses from pupils to the online Ofsted survey were also analysed. I also took into account the views of parents who I spoke to informally at the end of the school day.