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Dear Miss Crockford

Short inspection of Charing Church of England Aided 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Since joining the school, you have brought much needed stability following a prolonged period of turmoil in leadership and a decline in standards in many areas of learning. You are ably supported by the assistant headteacher, who is also the Year 1 and Year 2 teacher and is an excellent role model for other teachers in the school. In a short space of time, you have instilled confidence in staff and are gradually turning around the opinions of parents and pupils. You have been resolute in your determination to reassure parents and pupils of your commitment to the school, community, and most importantly to raising standards for pupils. The chair of the governing body has been constantly at your side to visibly uphold your own high expectations of others. Your resilience and commitment to redress a turbulent past has been commendable.

Parents have been justifiably concerned about the frequent changes in leadership and exceptionally high turnover in staff. Many parents chose to withdraw their children from the school, which led to a dramatic fall in numbers and impacted negatively on already small cohorts of pupils in each class. The number of pupils who have joined or left the school over the past two years has been very high. It is a mark of your achievement, and that of your staff, that the number of pupils attending the school has risen sharply this year. Parents are confident that the school is improving because you have a clear sense of direction and high levels of ambition for each pupil. Importantly, your ambition is being realised and pupils are making substantial progress as a result. This is because you have secured

permanent teachers in each class and quickly improved the quality of teaching across the school. A parent has reflected the views of many by saying: 'Charing has undoubtedly faced some pretty challenging circumstances. However, the last year particularly has really shown the school moving forward. The expectations are so much higher than they have been, teaching has now stabilised and it feels as though the school has a purpose again.'

In addition, you have tackled pupils' poor behaviour and low aspirations head on. Pupils are nurtured and safe, and have very positive attitudes to learning which is helping them to make excellent progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, the leadership team has recovered the good quality of education evident in the school at the time of the last inspection.

Characteristically, most children enter the school with knowledge, skills and understanding that are broadly well below that which is typical for children of their age. Progress during the early years is typically strong. In two of the previous three years, more children have reached a good level of development than the national average. This year will be no exception. In addition, approximately one fifth of children will exceed this expectation. Historically, this positive start has not been built upon because of difficulties in retaining and recruiting high-quality teachers.

You, with the support of the local authority, instantly worked to address this issue by taking the action necessary to eradicate poor teaching. The local authority has taken rigorous action to help you improve the school, including enabling you and your staff to work with leaders and external experts to share good practice and to confirm the growing strengths of the school. They have ensured that school improvement has been overseen by a senior school improvement adviser and the area education officer. They have been effective in holding leaders to account, and as a result, the school has improved rapidly. The local authority is confident in your leadership of the school because of the extraordinarily rapid improvements which you have achieved in a short space of time.

In addition, you have particularly welcomed support and collaboration with other schools from within, and outside of, the Tenterden Rural Alliance. Staff have been able to share pupils' work to make sure that their judgements about how well pupils are doing are secure.

You know the school's strengths and areas for development extremely well and have lost no time in addressing areas for improvement. You now have a positive staff team which is single-minded in its resolve to provide a higher standard of education for pupils. For example, your focus on using information about how well pupils are doing to ensure that learning is pitched to challenge all pupils has resulted in rapid improvement in pupils' writing across the school. Pupils' understanding and ability to apply mathematics to reason and solve problems has also improved rapidly.

Since your arrival, you and your staff have worked determinedly to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection in spite of very challenging

circumstances. Inspectors required leaders to ensure that pupils were fully engaged in their learning and could edit and improve their own work. In addition, leaders were asked to make certain that teachers adapted lessons to ensure that the needs of the most able and least able pupils were met. Furthermore, leaders were asked to improve pupils' confidence to apply mathematical calculations and to strengthen pupils' use of phonics to help them read and spell more accurately. Teaching has improved to be typically strong in all key stages and learning is now well-matched to pupils' needs. Pupils are increasingly building on what they already know and can do, to improve their attainment in phonics, writing and mathematics. Consequently, more pupils are working at the standard expected for their age, although attainment remains lower than that found nationally. The achievement in reading at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 is particularly noteworthy given pupils' very low attainment levels at the end of Year 2. Published performance information does not reflect the positive progress made by pupils in the previous academic year, particularly in Year 6. Progress measures have been severely affected by pupils joining and leaving the school at different times of the school year. However, it is true to say that pupils' good progress last year was insufficient to redress the impact of poor teaching in the past.

Governors share leaders' aspirations for pupils and the community. They have invested much time and dedication to support leaders' drive for school improvement. There is an open and transparent relationship between school leaders and governors and, because of this, governors are realistic about the school's effectiveness. Governors have welcomed support from the local authority and collaboration with other schools. They recognise that this has made a positive difference to how they secure improvement.

Leaders have developed school values and a clear vision, and have involved the whole school community in doing so. They are focused on raising the profile and reputation of the school in the local area once more. An indicator of this is increased parental participation in such things as the parents', teachers' and friends' association, in volunteering, and through taking part in training courses and curriculum workshops.

Through your commitment and perseverance, you and your staff team have given pupils the opportunity to succeed and be well-prepared for their future lives. This was sadly lacking prior to your arrival.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders consult with other professionals when necessary to make certain that they are protecting pupils from possible harm. If incidents or accidents occur, leaders ensure that pupils and parents are well informed. For example, following a road safety incident, leaders have shared appropriate details with parents and spoken to pupils about travelling to and from school safely. The school's junior road safety officers ensure that pupils have access to helpful information about how to cross the road safely.

The majority of pupils say that they feel safe because leaders have placed a strong emphasis on pupils' well-being. This is underpinned by positive and supportive relationships between staff and pupils. The majority of parents share this view and are very positive about the care, safety and welfare of their children. A parent expressed the views of others by saying: 'I feel able to talk to any member of staff and know they will do their best to help me with my concerns. I feel my child is challenged in lessons but is also cared for and safe at this school.'

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including how to stay safe online and how to report cyber bullying. During this inspection, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children spoke to pupils about types of abuse so that they are able to recognise it and report any concerns they might have. The youngest children have visits from the fire brigade to help them understand fire safety.

All staff feel that pupils are safe and that they behave well. Staff say that they are supported by leaders to manage pupils' behaviour if incidents do occur.

Thorough checks are made on staff and other adults when they work or volunteer at the school. All staff are trained in child protection procedures, including in areas relating to protecting pupils from radicalisation. Those responsible for governance support and strengthen safeguarding procedures by monitoring the school's work.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I focused on how effectively leaders, including governors, have continued to improve the school's effectiveness and address the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. I examined the progress that pupils have made from their various starting points, including middle-attaining pupils, the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged. I was particularly interested in the progress currently being made in writing and mathematics. I also explored the use and impact of pupil premium funding on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. I focused on how well the early stages of reading, known as phonics, is being taught. In addition, I evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding, how well the school supports families of pupils who have too many days off school and how well the school manages pupils' behaviour.
- You and other leaders have ambitious expectations for pupils' outcomes. Consequently, most pupils are making at least expected progress from their starting points and many pupils now make rapid progress to overcome past underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment, especially in writing, is improving at a fast pace and pupils' attainment in writing is now at a similar level as their attainment in reading. Staff use assessment information well to ensure that learning activities are well matched to the needs of pupils, including for pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are most-able. A parent noted: 'My child is happy at the school and is now making good progress and is really enjoying the stability of having consistent teaching staff and a much more energetic learning environment.' Undoubtedly, the very hard work that has

begun to raise pupils' achievement and aspirations needs to continue in order to restore pupils' attainment to be in line with national averages. Leaders recognise that giving pupils every opportunity to apply their English and mathematics skills across different subjects, such as science, will raise the rates of progress further.

- The most able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs. Evidence in pupils' books shows that learning is tailored to help them think more deeply and apply what they know in a range of ways. This is particularly evident in mathematics where pupils have ample opportunities to reason and gets to grips with more complex mathematical concepts. Occasionally, the most able pupils wait too long for other pupils to complete their work before moving on to the next steps in their learning. Sometimes, staff do not have high enough expectations of middle-attaining pupils to excel and, therefore, reach the highest standards in writing and mathematics.
- The additional government funding, known as pupil premium, is allocated effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their various starting points. The school's effective work in this area has significantly improved, following a pupil premium review you commissioned. The few most-able disadvantaged pupils now receive work that challenges them in English and mathematics and, consequently, achieve as well as their most-able classmates. Encouragingly, at the moment, disadvantaged pupils are making even greater progress than their classmates, and most are making accelerated progress. This is helping them to quickly diminish differences between their achievement and that of pupils nationally. As with other pupils in the school, few middle-attaining disadvantaged pupils make enough progress to reach the highest levels of attainment.
- You have rightly focused on improving outcomes in pupils' early reading skills. You know that the number of pupils who have achieved the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 1 has been too low. You have responded by ensuring that a consistent approach to teaching phonics is now in place and that staff have the expertise to deliver high-quality teaching. Although in the early stages of development, this more rigorous approach resulted in a greater number of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics in 2016 than in the past. This was the early sign of future growth. You have rightly continued to support pupils who did not reach the expected standard in Year 1. As a result, 86% of pupils in Year 2 have now secured the necessary skills to be confident early readers when only 14% of this group of pupils did so at the end of Year 1. This has helped pupils to overcome the legacy of underachievement, resulting from poor teaching in the past.
- Phonics is now taught well in the early years and key stage 1. Pupils are able to read with fluency and spell with emerging accuracy. This in turn has impacted positively on the progress that the youngest pupils are making in their writing. Undoubtedly, there is still more work to do to make certain that pupils, especially in key stage 2, are able to proficiently use their phonics skills to spell words accurately. Nonetheless, the proportion of pupils likely to achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check this year will be at least in line with the national average.

- You have transformed pupils' behaviour, and staff act as excellent role models for pupils. Pupils are polite and considerate of one another and concentrate well in lessons. In most lessons there is a tangible buzz of excitement to learn. One parent expressed their view by saying: 'The pride the children have in the school is now obvious and comes from the example set by the headteacher and the rest of the staff.' Leaders have worked hard to enable pupils to grow in confidence, regain trust in staff, and to aspire for themselves. Pupils are beginning to flourish, see themselves as learners, and delight in education once more.
- You have worked hard to make sure that pupils attend every day. This includes offering pupils exciting incentives, such as the opportunity to win a bicycle in a raffle. Your loyalty to the school, supported by the governors and your staff, ensures confidence from parents and pupils once more. As a result, attendance has improved substantially and is now in line with the national average. This is particularly noteworthy given an outbreak of chicken-pox and the long-term sickness of a small number of pupils last term. To sustain this, you need the continued support of parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly so that they continue to make the good progress now evident.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that pupils continue to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, to increase the proportion of pupils who are working at the level of achievement expected for their age
- raise teachers' expectations of pupils further, thereby increasing the proportion of pupils who make more than expected progress, especially middle-attaining pupils, so that even more pupils achieve the higher standard by the end of each key stage
- continue to focus on improving pupils' early reading skills so that pupils' spelling improves
- ensure that pupils have opportunities to apply and develop their skills in English and mathematics across the wider curriculum, to increase pupils' progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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 special educational needs coordinator, the pastoral support manager, and the English lead, who is also the assistant headteacher. In addition, I spoke with three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body who also participated in most other meetings with school leaders. I also met with the school improvement adviser, the senior school improvement adviser and the area education officer from the local authority.

We visited all classes together on a number of occasions. I spoke to pupils in lessons and met with a groups of pupils more formally to gather their views about the school. There were no pupil responses to the online survey because it was not accessible to them. I looked at pupils' English, mathematics and topic books with the assistant headteacher and viewed pupils' work during lessons. I took account of the 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 13 accompanying free-text responses. I spoke to a small number of parents at the start of the school day. I also took account of the nine responses made by staff to the online staff questionnaire. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about school improvement, pupils' achievement, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I also looked at, and discussed with you, the evaluation of the school's effectiveness.