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Dear Dr Davies

Short inspection of Little Horsted Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils like school and attend very well. They told me how much they enjoy their lessons and I was able to observe this for myself during my visit. One parent summed up the view of many by saying: 'My children are very happy at Little Horsted, they feel safe and nurtured in a very caring environment.'

You have worked well with leaders and staff to sustain good outcomes for pupils across the school over a number of years. Following the previous inspection, you were asked to enable more pupils to make outstanding progress through consistently good or better teaching. You have combined routine checks on the quality of teaching with targeted training to keep teaching improving. Pupils' progress in reading is a particular strength. Similarly, current pupils' writing skills are developing strongly from their varying starting points. Having identified that pupils were doing less well in mathematics than English, you focused everyone's attention on securing improvements in mathematics teaching. Pupils' progress in mathematics has improved. However, across subjects, leaders, governors and teachers have placed too much emphasis on keeping pace with typical age-related attainment. This has been enough to maintain similar levels of progress achieved by other pupils nationally, but not the substantial and sustained progress that would lift outcomes even higher.

Considering the small size of your team, you have shared leadership responsibility very well. You plan carefully for changes in personnel, supporting new leaders who

demonstrate strong potential to grow into their roles. With governors, you think strategically to secure the ongoing success and sustainability of the school. For example, the school has very recently extended early years provision to include Nursery-aged children. This has proved very popular with parents, and rightly so. Their children are getting off to a strong start in the effective Nursery provision.

Across the school, pupils experience a rich, varied and balanced range of learning opportunities. As a result, they develop a good bank of skills, knowledge and understanding that prepares them well for their secondary education. Pupils benefit from teaching expertise in subjects such as physical education and music. During my visit I heard guitar, violin and drumming lessons taking place – optional extras to build on singing, recorder and brass teaching for all pupils as they move through the school. An incredibly high proportion of pupils participate in after-school physical activities. The large majority of pupils participated in inter-school events last year. Governors spoke of the emphasis they place on unlocking the particular ‘talents’ that pupils may have. However, the starting points of pupils indicate that even more could reach higher standards in their academic studies if their progress was among the best compared with other pupils nationally.

Most parents are positive about what the school offers. Those who spoke informally at the start of the day were overwhelmingly positive. Parents’ verbal and written comments frequently described the family feel to the school and how approachable the staff are. It was clear from our discussions that you and your staff know individual pupils very well. A number of parents praised how well the school caters for the individual needs of their children. Very few disadvantaged pupils attend the school, but over time these pupils have usually done very well in relation to their particular starting points, including the most able disadvantaged.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a culture where safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility. Together, you have taken considerable care to ensure a systematic approach, with no sense of complacency or false reassurance because of the small size of the community. Leaders and governors have checked thoroughly that all staff have not only read the latest safeguarding guidance, but also understand its implications. All adults receive relevant training, including the induction of volunteers by a senior leader. When policies and processes are put to the test, leaders consider closely whether they have worked as well as they should. All staff and volunteers are subject to rigorous checks to determine their suitability. These checks are all recorded on the single central register, alongside additional non-statutory information, to ensure that nothing is missed.

Safeguarding records are thorough and of good quality. Class welfare books show that staff are vigilant and alert to low-level concerns, taking these seriously. The designated safeguarding leaders reflect carefully about the information they collect. Informed by close study of local authority thresholds for additional help, they provide each other with mutual challenge about when to escalate any concerns to the next level. The rationale for decisions they take is clear and well-reasoned.

Where other professionals are involved with pupils or families, they take good account of their input to this process.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I explored with you how well you and your team were maximising pupils' progress from their different starting points. We focused especially on mathematics during our observations because, in the past, pupils have made less progress in mathematics than reading and writing. Pupils' progress in mathematics has improved markedly. However, leaders are aware that pupils still make greater progress in reading and writing, so continue to tackle the issue. Pupils have positive attitudes to mathematics. The subject leader is a strong role model of effective teaching, for example exhibiting skilful questioning to prompt pupils to think through their own misconceptions.
- Leaders drew on research to inform their strategy for improving outcomes in mathematics. The subject leader trialled new approaches in his own teaching to make sure they worked well before training other staff. The positive impact is therefore most clearly evident in the subject leader's class, where pupils use the strategies they have learned to reason about mathematics and solve problems with increasing confidence. Leaders continue in their drive to bring the quality of all mathematics teaching in line with the best through training, monitoring and feedback to staff.
- Another area of focus during the inspection was the extent to which the most able pupils are enabled to excel. Overall, the proportions that reach the higher standards over time compare favourably with other pupils nationally at key stage 2. However, when comparing the progress made by other pupils nationally from the same starting points, more pupils could do even better. A large proportion of pupils reach high standards in reading, but the picture in writing and mathematics is more mixed.
- Most-able pupils generally feel well challenged. 'They push you really hard so you can only just do it,' was how one pupil put it. In some classes, pupils relish the opportunity to have a say in the difficulty level of the tasks they chose, so they can move on quickly if they are confident that they understand. I saw evidence of most-able writers taking substantial strides in their writing books over time. Pupils, including the most able, have positive attitudes to making mistakes. They told me how they are always reminded that, 'It's ok to not know, but it's not ok to not try.' However, the most able pupils that I spoke to struggled to find many mistakes in their mathematics books and felt they could be encouraged to think harder or tackle trickier concepts.
- While teachers consider how to extend most-able pupils when planning lessons, the level of challenge remains too variable for them to really excel. Teachers do not pitch teaching and activities consistently high enough to enable more pupils to make the strong and sustained progress that would enable them to reach higher standards.
- This year, you have expanded your early years provision to include Nursery-aged children, so I checked how successful this was. The 'Early Years Village' is

effective and developing strongly. Leaders thoroughly researched high-quality nursery practice elsewhere to supplement the expertise of the early years leader in school. Leaders and staff regularly review how well things are going and are clear sighted about further improvements they want to make, for example, to improve outdoor learning. The thoughtful planning invested in meeting the differing needs of older and younger children is paying off. Within the varied activities, there is a strong focus on literacy and numeracy throughout the environment. The quality of adults' interactions with children is strong because they know the sort of opportunities to promote the children's learning which they are looking for. In this way, adults demonstrate good instinct and firm understanding of how children of this age learn well.

- Nursery children are making a strong start. The children are very settled and engage happily in the varied, purposeful opportunities. During my visit, they were particularly excited comparing the weights of chicks, guinea pigs and a tortoise. Adults thought carefully in advance of different ways to optimise learning from this opportunity, but were equally responsive to what children said in the moment. For example, comparing similarities and differences in numbers of arms and legs was sparked by one boy's observation. For Reception children, some lovely writing emerged from the day's activities on fact sheets and in books about tortoises that children had made. They set up a simple science experiment to identify the tortoise's favourite food. Uninhibited by not always knowing the correct spelling, one child used their phonic knowledge well to write: 'A tortoise has a shel and is faifroot food is leefes.' [A tortoise has a shell and his favourite food is leaves.]

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a much sharper focus at all levels on securing the best possible progress from pupils' particular starting points
- expectations of what children can achieve are raised further so that more pupils reach the highest standards across subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you accompanied me as I visited all classes to observe teaching and learning, look at pupils' work and talk to them about their learning. I held discussions with you, other leaders and staff, governors, a representative of the local authority, parents and pupils. I took account of 30 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as 20 confidential questionnaire responses from pupils and one from a member of staff. All of the written comments that were added to these were considered alongside other inspection evidence. Before visiting, I reviewed the school's website and a variety of information about the school's performance over time. On site, I scrutinised safeguarding arrangements.