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Ms Nicola Ball
Executive Headteacher
Ashlands Church of England First School
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Dear Ms Ball

Short inspection of Ashlands Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good quality of education identified at the previous inspection. Supported well by other staff and governors, you have successfully built upon the strengths identified then. You have also improved other aspects of the school, which is why parents are so enthusiastic about the quality of education that their children receive.

Pupils throughout the school behave well and enjoy learning in an environment where they feel valued, safe and well supported. Parents were keen to tell me this. They acknowledge your role in helping to move the school forwards, particularly in addressing the dip in performance which was evident in last year's test results for pupils at the end of Year 2. The great majority of pupils now make good progress throughout the school. All groups of pupils, including the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, share in this good achievement.

A knowledgeable and active governing body has supported you well in consolidating the success of Ashlands' federation with Misterton Church of England First School. You have successfully adapted the school to the demands of a new curriculum and a new method of assessment. There is a clear strategic vision for how the school should continue to improve academically, while maintaining existing strengths in the quality of care and support for pupils and their personal development. Initiatives such as the breakfast club have helped to improve the confidence and the progress of vulnerable pupils. Staff have benefited from increased opportunities to improve

their own expertise, often working closely with staff within other local schools.

You have continued to improve teaching and the accountability of staff. You check the quality of teaching and learning rigorously. The school has benefited from some recent strong staff appointments. Staff clearly share your vision for further improvement. You have successfully resolved the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. It is clear that the school has a strong capacity to improve even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that pupils' safety and well-being have a high priority. I talked to staff and governors during the inspection to check that they are fully aware of their responsibilities and roles in safeguarding. This is the case, and they outlined the recent training they had received. This covered various aspects, such as recognising 'danger signs' in vulnerable pupils and knowing how they should respond. Staff and governors are aware of issues around the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. They have benefited from recent 'Prevent' training.

The school gives appropriate attention to the potential dangers of the internet. You provide parents with helpful information on how to keep their children safe when using computers at home.

Parents are confident that their children are safe in school. They welcome the fact that the school looks after their children well. You reinforce this confidence by ensuring that adults in school are securely checked and cleared to work with children. The school maintains a strong culture of safeguarding.

You have detailed policies and procedures in place to ensure safety. You have ensured that all arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and are of high quality. For example, staff record the details of any incidents that arise. You make sure that the school deals with these thoroughly, involving parents or external agencies where appropriate.

Inspection findings

- Standards have risen across the school since you became executive headteacher. The school development plan clearly details priorities such as improving attainment and progress still further. You are very clear how this should be achieved.
- One of my key lines of enquiry during this inspection was to check the progress of boys in Reception. Children usually join the school with relatively low levels of knowledge, skill and personal development for their age. They have increasingly made good progress, resulting in an overall good level of development close to what is expected nationally for children at the end of Reception.
- Until recently, boys' achievement had been much lower than that of girls. The relatively new early years leader recognised that this situation needed to change.

He put a particular focus on strengthening boys' personal and social development as well as improving their language and literacy skills. This has involved, for example, improving outdoor resources and encouraging boys as well as girls to make more effective use of them as learning tools. The result of these efforts has been a rapid rise in boys' achievement, so that there is now practically no gap between the achievement of boys and girls in Reception.

- This good progress is evident in the children's records of learning. The school meticulously keeps the evidence of the children's assessed work in order to clearly show the rate of progress made by each child. The great majority of children in Reception are on track to achieve a good level of development in the current school year. High expectations have been the key to this success in early years and have ensured that children are very well prepared for their move into Year 1.
- My second key line of enquiry looked at how well pupils in Years 1 and 2 make progress in mathematics, reading and writing, particularly in light of the disappointing results of last year's assessments.
- You explained that weaknesses in teaching and assessment had contributed significantly to the underachievement last year. You have resolutely resolved these weaknesses through a combination of actions that include staffing changes and redeployment of existing staff; more rigorous checking of the quality of teaching and learning; more focused assessment; providing additional support for those pupils falling behind; and providing more support for staff to develop their confidence and skills.
- I saw the success of your efforts both in the school's current progress information and in my extensive scrutiny of pupils' work. Importantly, the good progress is evident in the work of all groups of pupils in Years 1 and 2, including the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the few pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- A much higher proportion of pupils are now on track to meet appropriate standards for their age. Also, more pupils exceed these standards and achieve at greater depth in both English and mathematics. In mathematics, pupils now show good reasoning and problem-solving skills. This increased progress is sustained in the work of pupils in Years 3 and 4.
- You recognise that although progress in writing has improved, it is less rapid and consistent than in reading and mathematics. We agreed that the main reason for slower progress in writing is that pupils in key stage 1 do not get enough opportunities to write at more length and in more depth. You acknowledge that progress in key stage 1 could be improved further if staff had more opportunity to see the best teaching practice elsewhere.
- My third line of enquiry was about the attendance of pupils who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their attendance has been below average, whereas the attendance of all other groups in the school has for some time been above average.
- You have worked hard with parents to instil the importance of regular attendance, bringing in support from external agencies when necessary. Your

recent introduction of the breakfast club has contributed significantly to encouraging more regular attendance. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is still below average, but the gap between their attendance and that of other pupils is now much narrower. The remaining gap is due to a very small number of pupils whose attendance is hampered by specific medical issues.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff provide more opportunities for pupils in key stage 1 to write at length and in greater depth to raise their attainment and improve their progress further
- the effectiveness of teaching is improved further by creating more opportunities for staff to see and learn from the best practice elsewhere, particularly in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

John Laver
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other staff. I met two members of the governing body, including the chair. I talked to several parents in the playground at the start of the school day. I listened to pupils in key stage 1 reading and talking about books. I analysed 37 responses to Parent View. I visited all the classrooms with you to observe learning and behaviour. I looked extensively at pupils' work in order to see what progress they were making. We considered the attainment and progress of pupils in the school. You showed me records relating to attendance, safeguarding and other documentation. I had a telephone conversation with the school's improvement partner.