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Mrs Tracey Bratley
Executive headteacher
Chrishall Holy Trinity and St Nicholas CofE (Aided) Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bratley

Short inspection of Chrishall Holy Trinity and St Nicholas CofE (Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You took up the post of headteacher in September 2012, after the previous inspection. Since then, you have worked with resilient determination and effort to maintain, build upon and further improve the good quality of education in the school. Additionally, in September 2016, your school established a partnership with a neighbouring school and you are now executive headteacher leading both schools.

Chrishall is characterised by the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural ethos that permeates throughout the school. This is 'lived and breathed' by all staff, governors and pupils, using the school's chosen values summarised in the acronym REACH, (Respect, Enjoyment, Achievement, Christian caring and Health), whereby pupils 'reach to be the best they can be'. Many aspects of this work were verified in January 2017 when the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools inspection judged your school outstanding.

You have embedded an aspirational learning culture for pupils, staff and governors by providing a well-defined strategic vision to develop the school further. Your school is a happy, safe place. All staff and pupils are welcoming and are clearly proud of their school. Pupils behave well and show high levels of confidence and maturity from a young age. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive,

based on mutual respect and trust. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and were keen to talk to me about the work they are doing. They say that they enjoy reading, writing and mathematics but also have an equal chance to learn and use their skills in other curriculum subjects. As a result of the positive learning attitudes you and your staff instil in pupils, they all make good progress from their starting points and achieve well. Consequently, by the end of Year 6, pupils are prepared for the next stages in their education.

Under your clear and ambitious leadership, your staff have been very committed to ensure that Chrishall continues to improve. All staff understand their roles and responsibilities and share your vision to provide the very best for pupils. You have established an open, honest culture among the team, where the sharing of practice and the continual professional dialogue you encourage ensure that all staff are striving to be the best they can. Staff say that they appreciate the support and guidance you provide and consider that 'the team spirit ensures that all staff are included in the work of the school' and say that it is 'a fabulous place where children come first'.

Your reflective and evaluative governors know the school well. They offer you effective support and are prepared to challenge leaders where they believe more can be achieved. For example, they know that, to make sure that pupils leave the school ready for their secondary school and have the best possible 'life' chances, pupils need to achieve well at their school. Governors are constantly endeavouring to make the school better in all areas so that the pupils at Chrishall receive the best opportunities to excel.

The curriculum is a strength of your school. Staff plan all subjects, giving 'real' purpose to the tasks and learning. It encourages pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding of the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics across all other subject areas. For example, during the inspection, Years 5 and 6 had an afternoon role-playing a Tudor banquet in front of their parents. They used their knowledge of Henry VIII and his wives to perform and incorporated their understanding of key aspects of Tudor life within this. In addition to this, your weekly 'challenge time', which pupils love, stems from the curriculum planning. Pupils say that it gives them the chance to do 'what we want with the skills we have learned'. For example, Years 3 and 4 eagerly shared their various Monet interpretations ready for an art gallery display for their parents.

You and the governors have identified the correct priorities for the next stage of development at Chrishall and are taking the right steps to make the improvements. You are very realistic about where the school is, and this is reflected accurately in your school self-evaluation. You are rightly placing a priority on pupils' writing across the school. This continues to be a focus for the school to enable more pupils to reach the higher standards of which they are capable.

You and the special needs coordinator are very aware that the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities requires further development. Since her appointment in September 2016, the new coordinator has

worked swiftly to ensure that the national changes around special educational needs provision are implemented more securely. This includes looking specifically at teachers adapting provision appropriately to meet the needs of pupils if the requirement is for pupils to 'catch up' because of gaps in their learning, rather than being linked to a special educational need and/or disability. Consequently, the special needs coordinator is re-reviewing pupils' needs to ensure that the use of teaching assistants and additional resources is targeted accurately and appropriately for those pupils who need it.

Parents are positive about the school's work. Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) shows that parents are very pleased with their children's academic progress and personal development. One parent said:

'To understand the special qualities and ethos that are underpinned at Chrishall, they need to be witnessed first-hand. To see the children look out for one another, understand their REACH values, and see how the children incorporate them into their daily routine, is a joy to see.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records maintained are detailed and of a high quality.

You have created a strong and universal culture of safeguarding at the school. You are meticulous about making sure that thorough checks are made on all staff to confirm their suitability to work with children. You ensure that there is regular and effective training for all staff and governors to ensure that they are up to date in their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. You 'spot-check' aspects of safeguarding intermittently and also engage in external reviews, doing all you can to make sure that pupils are safe.

You, as the designated safeguarding lead, have strong and effective links with the relevant outside agencies and consult with them when necessary. You record your actions and monitoring in a detailed and meticulous manner. You follow safeguarding issues through effectively, and work well with families to develop trusting and positive relationships.

Pupils report feeling safe at school. They have a good awareness of when they may be at risk and how to manage this effectively. Pupils relate this to when they are using the internet and when they are outside of school.

Parents are confident that their children are well looked after. All parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire said that they agreed that their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- We agreed at the start of the inspection that the two areas for improvement identified at the last inspection would contribute towards the key lines of enquiry

for this inspection. One of these was to raise attainment in writing, particularly for most-able pupils.

- Leaders have successfully focused on improving writing across the school for all pupils, including the most able. Pupils are given ample opportunity to learn grammar, punctuation and spelling skills and use them accurately in their writing. Pupils use a 'success criteria checklist' well to challenge themselves when writing independently. Teachers are giving better guidance to pupils about what is expected when writing for different purposes. You also lead additional writing groups that are supporting the most able pupils to achieve better from their higher starting points.
- Pupils have the chance to practise their skills and write in greater depth in other curriculum subjects. For example, pupils' books show that they completed descriptive writing about the physical features of Indus Valley and rehearsed their first-person writing skills in a piece of writing about the Celtic queen, Boudicca. As a result of this focused work and effective teaching, pupils are writing more of a consistently high quality, and good progress is evident over time.
- The second area you were tasked with improving from the previous inspection was increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching. Since that time, most of the teaching staff have changed. However, despite the changes, teaching, learning and assessment are effective across the school, with some models of excellence being exhibited in some areas. This is a result of your support, guidance, role-modelling and challenge for teachers to meet the needs of all pupils in their classes and 'make sure all lessons are as good as the best ones'.
- The next line of enquiry was linked to the impact of the school's soft federation with Manuden Primary School. Prior to the collaboration of the two schools, you worked studiously with a range of different stakeholders to implement a clear plan of action. Due to your careful strategic overview and planning and the sharing of expertise and leadership capacity across both schools, this has been a positive partnership for Chrishall.
- Another aspect I focused on during this inspection was looking at how you are working to improve the writing and mathematics attainment of girls in key stage 1. This came about because, in the 2016 outcomes, although girls' attainment was generally in line with the national average, a group of these girls did not achieve as well as they should from their key stage 1 starting points.
- Your precise monitoring of their provision rapidly highlights any gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and teachers respond to this swiftly in the planning and delivery of their teaching. The girls' books show that they are being given the chance to apply their number and calculation skills to problem-solving and being encouraged to explain their thinking so that they can demonstrate that they have a secure understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Additionally, girls are showing that they are increasingly knowledgeable about using grammar and punctuation well in their independent writing. School information indicates that girls are successfully, or quickly working towards,

meeting or exceeding the end-of-year expectations for both writing and mathematics.

- A further line of enquiry considered how effectively leaders are spending the additional funding they receive for the small number of disadvantaged pupils. You and the governors firmly believe that it is crucial for emotional well-being needs to be met, as this helps pupils achieve better. You invest in support such as one-to-one tailored teaching, as well as specialist input from play therapists and other agencies to address pupils' social and emotional needs. In all cases, disadvantaged pupils develop well socially and emotionally, and make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The final area I explored was looking at how you are improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. This was a line of enquiry because, over two consecutive years, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally. In 2016, persistent absence is also high for disadvantaged pupils.
- You demonstrated that you work closely with families that require support to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Where there are issues, you act accordingly, following your school's agreed policy and promoting good attendance for all. The effective work you do encouraging good attendance is confirmed in the school's attendance data, which shows overall attendance levels are consecutively above the national average over a number of years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- their effective work focusing on pupils' attainment in writing ensures that a greater proportion of pupils achieve the higher standard of which they are capable by the end of Year 6
- continuing work targets support to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities when they require it, and identifies when pupils' needs can be well met through effective classroom teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this inspection, I held meetings with you, the special needs coordinator, the school office personnel, the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I also met with a representative from the local authority.
- I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning, jointly with you, in all classes, and sampling of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.
- I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement, assessment information for all year groups, documents relating to pupils' attendance and the school's pupil premium report.
- I observed a whole-school assembly led by Year 5 and 6 pupils. I also spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms and met more formally with two groups of pupils.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- I took into account the 58 parent responses on the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and your school's recent January 2017 parent survey. I also considered the results provided by 13 members of staff in the school's staff questionnaire.