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Miss Lucy Henderson
Head of School
Trottscliffe Church of England Primary School
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Dear Miss Henderson

Short inspection of Trottscliffe 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The school has had significant changes in leadership since the last inspection. Governors have worked tirelessly to strengthen leadership and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. During this time, the headteacher resigned and all but one of the teaching staff left. You joined the school in May 2016 for one day a week as head of school, pending the substantive headteacher leaving the school in July 2016. During this period an executive headteacher also supported the school on a part-time basis. Parental concerns were high about such instability and several families removed their children from the school. Since your secondment to the school on a full-time basis from September 2016, you have been supported by a new executive headteacher, initially for two days a week and currently for one day a week.

The impact of your leadership is evident in the stability you have brought to the school. It is clear you have the confidence of parents, pupils, staff, governors and the local authority. Parents who I spoke to at the beginning of the day were effusive in their praise for the happy atmosphere which now prevails. Several parents sought me out at the beginning and end of the day to tell me of their renewed confidence in the school. They feel that you listen to their concerns and that the changes you have made are very positive. Evidence of the confidence now felt in the school is

that requests for places in September 2017 are higher than ever before, and numbers are again rising.

You are building a strong team of committed staff who share your vision of excellence for the school. You recognise that middle leaders are new to their roles and that they need to monitor teaching even more closely so that pupils of all abilities are appropriately challenged.

You were quite rightly concerned about the recent dip in standards in key stages 1 and 2 in writing, and in phonics in Years 1 and 2. Staff training in the teaching of phonics and the use of quality texts to inspire children's writing are leading to rapidly raising standards. The importance of improving standards in writing across the school is shared by the pupils. As one pupil told me: 'Every lesson is a literacy lesson. You push yourself as much as you can and you know your personal challenges.' There are now many more opportunities to write at length in different curriculum subjects. You agree with me that presentation and handwriting are the weakest aspects of writing and that more pupils need to write at greater depth.

Pupils' previous negative experiences of learning have been overcome. Pupils say that their lessons are fun and that teachers really try to make learning interesting. Relationships between teachers and pupils are warm and respectful and enthusiasm for learning is high.

The effectiveness of teaching in mathematics has improved as more emphasis has been placed on developing pupils' reasoning skills in every class. This has led to pupils working at greater depth in mathematics and more suitable challenge for the most able pupils.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching. This has been addressed. Leaders were also asked to match tasks to individual pupils' needs more precisely to enable them to make even better progress. The achievement of all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is now analysed closely, and planning is adapted to support those pupils who may be at risk of falling behind or who need further challenge.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that staff and governors, including those new to the school, understand safeguarding policies and procedures. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and regularly updated in line with current statutory guidance. Checks on the suitability of staff are recorded appropriately.

You know your families well. Parents spoke of the strong sense of community within the school and how well children look after one another. Children feel safe and valued by their peers and teachers. They feel they can speak to trusted adults if they have any worries and that the school is special, 'like a family'.

The school works closely with outside agencies when children are thought to be at

risk. Staff thoroughly record and follow up any incidents or concerns to make sure they do not lead to pupils being unsafe. They also follow up the very few incidents of poor behaviour to make sure they are dealt with effectively, yet fairly.

Attendance rates have improved for all groups of pupils and are now above national averages overall. You investigate all absences to make sure they are not related to safeguarding matters.

Inspection findings

- The focus of the inspection was to identify, given the many leadership and staffing changes that have taken place, what actions the school is taking to sustain its previously good performance. Inspection activities also focused on whether all pupils make the progress they are capable of in writing, phonics and mathematics. I also looked at whether attendance rates were improving and whether pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were being supported well in school.
- The governing body has a very accurate view of the strengths and areas to develop in the school. Governors have undertaken training in how to interpret information about pupils' performance so that they can hold leaders to account. They strike a good balance between supporting and challenging leaders. They are delighted with your leadership and share your commitment to driving improvements and raising standards.
- Your determination and aspiration for the school have had a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning. You have established a more thorough system of assessment and tracking of pupils' progress. This helps leaders hold teachers to account for pupils' progress and enables appropriate measures to be introduced when pupils are not making the progress expected of them. Evidence in pupils' work shows that standards in mathematics are also rising. You have brokered support for teachers in how to raise standards in writing through training staff in the teaching of phonics and the use of quality texts. As a result, progress in writing is accelerating throughout the school. You rightly acknowledge that presentation of writing in books is the next improvement the school needs to focus on.
- Since the last inspection, you have introduced new leadership structures. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator has set up systems and processes for early identification of need. Support processes are now closely monitored and staff held to account for pupils' progress. All staff are now clear that responsibility for the progress of all children, of all abilities, is theirs, and not that of a middle leader.
- Leaders of mathematics and English are becoming increasingly effective in their roles. The planning of work in mathematics is more consistently effective across the school, including greater emphasis on developing pupils' reasoning skills. Subject leaders have begun to monitor the quality of teaching through visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' work. The full impact of their work to improve teaching and learning is yet to be seen as these roles are at an early stage of development.

- Progress in mathematics, phonics and writing indicates that most pupils are on track to meet at least expected levels at the end of each key stage, with a greater proportion than last year set to exceed expected standards.
- The local authority has provided effective support for the school during changes of leadership. The authority recognises how quickly you have rebuilt parental confidence and sustained the good quality of education in the school.
- You have split Year 6 into a single year group each morning, and pupils love the extra attention they are able to have in a smaller group. Their progress in English and mathematics has accelerated, and standards in writing are already higher than at the end of Year 6 last year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils working at expected levels in phonics in Year 1, and at greater depth in writing at the end of key stages 1 and 2, increases
- presentation of work in books improves, particularly handwriting
- middle leaders sharpen their monitoring of teaching and learning, so that they provide more effective guidance and support for teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and your executive headteacher. I also met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I observed the quality of learning with you in all classrooms. I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information, the school improvement plan, leaders' self-evaluation, pupils' work, and child protection procedures and policies. I talked to pupils about their learning and jointly looked at their books with your middle leaders. I observed behaviour at morning playtime. I viewed the 16 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as seven staff questionnaires. At the beginning and end of the day, I had conversations with parents and carers.