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Mrs Gemma White
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Dear Mrs White

Short inspection of Fletching Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment in September 2016, you have developed an ethos of high expectations for all. Your meticulous approach has transformed the school's culture and is benefiting positively the educational and emotional needs of pupils. You have tackled the school's weaknesses head on and have united your staff in this endeavour. Your determination and resilience have paid dividends. Disappointing key stage 2 results in 2016 are not indicative of a downward trend in pupils' attainment. You value the opportunities you have had to work in partnership with other schools to share good practice and elevate your school's effectiveness simultaneously. With the high-quality support of governors and the local authority, you have reversed the school's prospects for the future. Following a period of changes in leadership and fluctuating standards, the leadership team has recovered successfully the good quality of education evident in the school at the time of the last inspection.

You have made certain that the school's work to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection has continued. The curriculum engages pupils and provides them with a wealth of opportunities to practise and apply their English and mathematics skills. For instance, Year 3 and 4 pupils described a woolly mammoth in an English lesson because they are studying the stone age in their topic work. A pupil vividly wrote: 'Bravely, the big furry elephant with gleaming white tusks crashed through the dark murky water. Excitement rushed rapidly through the anxious tribe who were lurking in the nearby reeds.' The curriculum is balanced and

enriched by a wide range of additional activities, such as animal handling workshops. As a result, learning is pleasurable and most pupils make good progress across a wide range of subjects. One pupil told me how much she enjoyed learning because 'you never know what's coming out of [staff's] heads!' Senior and middle leaders have ably supported you in your pursuit of high standards. The input and impact of subject leaders have been invaluable in relation to the school's positive journey. You have detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and what needs to be done to make it even better. School leaders and governors know that there is still more work to do to raise pupils' attainment in key stage 2 by making certain that pupils, including the most able, make the good progress of which they are capable.

Parents are tremendously positive about the school and exude support of your leadership and the tangible improvements you have forged since your appointment. A parent reflected the views of many by writing, 'Mrs White has introduced a phenomenal new energy and clear management to the school.' As a result, parents are upbeat about the positive experience that staff are providing for their children on a daily basis and for the school, which lies in the centre of the community. Parents are absolutely committed to your vision.

Governors add to the capacity of leaders to improve the school further. Governors are outward looking, aspirational and skilled. They share your ambitions for pupils and have absolute confidence in your ability to realise the school's strategic plans. Their acute knowledge of education enables them to ask searching questions about the school's work in a challenging and supportive way. This, combined with your open and transparent relationship as leaders, enables you all to know the strengths and weaknesses of the school in impressive detail. You acknowledge the importance of being held to account, not only by governors, but by the local authority, the diocese, and, significantly, by parents. As such, you welcome support and constructive criticism to enable the school to make rapid strides in improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Underpinning this is an environment that protects pupils, alongside staff and governors that care deeply for pupils' well-being. A parent affectionately wrote, 'I feel that they are really listening to mine and my child's concerns and needs.' Governors take their responsibility to safeguard pupils very seriously and discharge their statutory duties well.

You have recognised rightly the importance of building pupils' positive feelings of self-worth and healthy mental attitudes, and instilled this belief in others. Effective strategies are in place to nurture pupils' growing ambitions, ability to persevere and to strive when work or situations are difficult and challenging. You model and encourage a can-do ethos to raise pupils' aspirations and prepare them for life beyond Fletching Primary School. Consequently, pupils have laudable attitudes to learning and to each other. Most pupils flourish because they are increasingly resilient and demonstrate a blossoming pride in their achievements. Leaders

continue to aspire for all pupils to be actively involved in their own learning and to develop positive ambitions for their futures.

Pupils are kind, considerate and display exemplary behaviour. They enjoy coming to school and seeing their friends. They value the strong bonds that they have with each other and are adamant that bullying does not happen. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take. They say that if any minor disagreements occur, adults help them to sort things out quickly. Pupils say they feel safe on the playground because it is small and an adult can easily 'see everything'. Pupils have planted a living willow dome and surrounded it with 'ponder pebbles' to create a peaceful place on the playground for reflection.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe effectively. A younger pupil told me that the registers are taken to make sure that no one is missing, demonstrating a good understanding of what the school does to help keep pupils safe. Parents unanimously agree that their children are happy, well cared for and safe at school.

Pupils' attendance is above the national average for primary schools. The number of pupils that have too many days off school is very low. Leaders work hard to support families when attendance is not as good as it should be. You are rightly tenacious in your pursuit of excellent attendance as the gateway for successful educational achievement and development of vital core skills for life.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I focused on how effectively leaders have continued to improve the school's effectiveness and addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. I examined the progress that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are currently making, particularly in reading and mathematics. I was particularly interested to see how well the most able and middle-attaining pupils are being challenged and supported to reach the highest standards, especially in key stage 2. I focused on how well English, grammar, punctuation and spelling are being taught throughout the school. In addition, I evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding and how well the school supports families of pupils who have too many days off school.
- The progress that pupils made in reading by the end of key stage 2 in 2016 was not good enough. Consequently, too few pupils reached the standard expected for their age. You quickly identified the need for swift intervention and have introduced a plethora of strategies to ignite pupils' love of reading, thereby raising their attainment and ability to predict and infer meaning, for example. Among other initiatives, you have revitalised the library, introduced pupil librarians, given pupils access to a range of competitions, and, importantly, ensured that powerful, rich text is used to kindle pupils' imagination and to inspire their writing. Using the text 'The tin forest' as inspiration, Years 3 and 4 pupils entered a 500-word writing competition. Pupils' work is proudly displayed in the school corridor and reflects the lyrical response made by pupils to the text. Pupils wrote: 'Strong tiger whiskers twitching slowly', 'Golden tigers pouncing deviously' and 'wonderful flowers glowing brightly'. Now, all pupils are making at

least the progress expected of them in reading. However, pupils' progress in reading still lags behind that found in writing and mathematics. You are determined to continue the upward momentum of pupils' attainment in reading and to build on pupils' substantial achievements in the Year 1 phonics screening check.

- Some pupils in upper key stage 2 have substantial gaps in their mathematical knowledge and understanding because important building blocks were not taught well enough in the past. Ably supported by the mathematics leader, you have worked diligently to address this. Pupils are working towards mastery in mathematics. They reason and investigate the most effective ways to tackle complex calculations. There are many opportunities for pupils to apply what they have learned in other subjects, and to solve mathematical problems. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 investigated the number of coupons required to buy a variety of clothes during the second world war, and pupils in Year 3 replenished the potion shop's stock of 'liquid sunshine' and 'unicorn tears' by accurately measuring fluid in millilitres. As a consequence, all pupils are making at least expected progress in mathematics and most are making even greater progress, especially in key stage 2. This is because mathematics is now taught consistently well throughout the school.
- Over time, the teaching of grammar and punctuation, and also spelling, has not been reliably effective in securing pupils' good application of these skills in their writing across a range of subjects. Consequently, some pupils in upper key stage 2 struggle to spell tricky or unfamiliar words accurately. You are making certain that all teachers have high expectations of pupils' writing and that they provide pupils with useful support and guidance to help them improve their own writing. This includes learning intentions and success criteria that are personal to each pupil. For example, pupils in Year 2 are encouraged to use expanded nouns, alliteration and adjectives in their writing. You have introduced discrete lessons and interventions, focusing on grammar and spelling, that are reaping rewards. Pupils are now making great strides in their writing, especially in upper key stage 2. Pupils' work is testament to their rapidly improving attainment in this subject.
- The proportion of pupils in the school who are disadvantaged is very low compared to the national average. It is therefore difficult to compare the achievement of this group of pupils from one year to the next. However, pupil premium funding is carefully allocated and evaluated to measure the difference it is making to the outcomes of this vulnerable group. Leaders target pupils' individual needs, as they do for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders know the needs of pupils exceptionally well and expect all staff to share that knowledge. They make certain that staff receive appropriate training to help them undertake their role effectively. Highly effective leadership of this bespoke approach ensures that pupils make good progress from their starting points. As with other pupils in the school, too few disadvantaged pupils reach the highest levels of achievement in key stage 2.
- The most able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs. In 2016, a third of children exceeded a good level of development by the end of Reception Year. The proportion of pupils that reached the higher standard at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 was also above the national average in reading,

writing and mathematics. No pupils attained the higher standard by the end of key stage 2 in 2016. A legacy of ineffective teaching has meant that too few pupils are working at the highest standard in upper key stage 2. Leaders are working hard to redress this in order to enable the most able pupils and middle-attaining pupils to attain well and reach the standards of which they are capable. Encouragingly, evidence in pupils' work shows that learning is tailored to help them think more deeply and apply what they know in a range of ways. Consequently, the most able pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and leaders estimate that more pupils will reach the highest standard than in the past. Leaders know that this forward momentum needs to be sustained to enable pupils to secure the highest possible outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- increase the proportion of pupils who make more than expected progress, especially middle-attaining pupils, so that even more of them achieve the highest standards by the end of key stage 2
- continue to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in mathematics and English in order to eradicate the detrimental effects of poor teaching in the past, particularly for pupils in upper key stage 2
- embed the good work already started to improve pupils' progress in reading, which in turn will continue to impact positively on their writing skills, including their accurate use of grammar and spelling.

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

Abigail Birch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other school leaders and three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to a representative of the local authority. I observed learning, with you and the special educational needs coordinator, in all year groups except Year 5 who were out of school during the time of this inspection. I spoke to pupils during lessons, and met with them formally to gather their views. In addition, I listened to pupils reading their books and their own writing in lessons. I looked at pupils' work in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, topic and children's early learning journals with the English lead, the mathematics lead and yourself. I took account of 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 12 written contributions by parents. I spoke

to parents at the start of the school day. In addition, I took account of a written contribution made by a member of staff during the inspection. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about the achievement of pupils, school policies and safeguarding procedures. I also discussed your self-evaluation with you.