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8 May 2017

Mrs Rachel West
Headteacher
Firle Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs West

Short inspection of Firle Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 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 your school was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the head of school took up your leadership posts in September 2016. You are also the headteacher of a neighbouring school. Your leadership has brought much-needed stability to the school after a period of uncertainty in which there has been three headteachers in four years. You are successfully creating a culture in which all staff work together effectively and productively, including with the staff of the school where you are the substantive headteacher. There is a shared vision of providing the very best for each pupil. Staff and governors are ambitious for all pupils. Parents typically appreciate the school, with one describing it as, 'A warm, friendly, quite special little school.'

The school has also experienced other changes to staffing since the previous inspection. There are several new governors and teaching staff. You have invested effectively in the training of those new to the school, and also strengthened middle leadership. These changes have ensured that teaching across the school is effective and that the skills of staff are continually improving.

Areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been successfully tackled. Attendance has improved markedly and the level of challenge for the most able pupils has strengthened. You and your head of school were able to explain clearly to me the many strengths of the school, as well as those areas that still need to be developed. This is because you evaluate the school's work accurately.

Pupils enjoy school, behave well in lessons and around the school and show respect and courtesy to staff and visitors. Pupils like their lessons because teachers make learning interesting and help them understand how to succeed.

Pupils are making rapid progress in all year groups. They read widely and apply their reading skills effectively. For example, pupils in Year 6 analysed the story of 'The storm breaker' in detail and were able to understand the characters in the story. Pupils develop their writing skills quickly and use them to write powerfully for different purposes and in a range of styles. The school's catch-up programmes have been effective in improving achievement for disadvantaged pupils in reading and writing. However, opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills fully in other subjects are limited. Achievement in mathematics is good, but not as strong as in reading and writing. Occasionally, teachers do not challenge pupils enough, particularly in problem-solving activities in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. There is a strong culture of safeguarding which is woven through all aspects of the school's work. The single central record indicates that all required checks have been made on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. You and the head of school undertake the role of designated safeguarding lead effectively, with governors ensuring that child protection work meets all the statutory requirements of up-to-date legislation. Recently, for example, the link governor with responsibility for safeguarding carried out a review of the school's single central record. Governors and staff have been trained in keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. As a result, staff understand what is required of them. The school works effectively with external agencies to help keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- I looked closely at the achievement of boys in the early years. The school's assessment information indicates that boys are making rapid progress. Children's work in their 'learning journals' shows they get many opportunities to develop their writing and mathematical skills. Adults assess children's skills accurately to ensure that children's engagement and learning is of a consistently high level.
- Teaching in the early years motivates and inspires children to learn well. The outside area and classroom provide good opportunities for children to explore and learn in different ways. For example, the 'large paper' writing in the outside area encourages children, including boys, to write sentences confidently and with increasing accuracy.
- I looked closely at how well girls achieve in key stage 1 in reading. Girls in Years 1 and 2 make good progress in reading and many of the most able pupils develop above-average skill levels. Teachers have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve in their reading. Consequently, pupils work hard to fully

understand the challenging texts they read.

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use this to good effect in the teaching of reading. Evidence from pupils' work shows they use their early reading skills to accurately spell a range of adventurous words in their writing. Pupils are prepared well for tackling harder work as they move through the school, for example understanding complex narratives. Standards are rising.
- I looked closely at pupils' attainment in mathematics, particularly that of girls and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have ensured that pupils achieve well because staff use a wide variety of strategies to check that pupils are learning well. For example, teachers use testing questions during class discussions.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics but not as well as they do in reading and writing. Activities do not give pupils enough opportunities to consolidate and build their mathematical skills through problem-solving tasks. Leaders are aware of this and are reviewing the planning of the mathematics curriculum. Changes put in place have already begun to accelerate pupils' progress.
- You and other leaders have taken effective action to improve writing skills for different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and boys. For example, pupils who need to catch up are supported well to produce writing which often meets the age-related expectations for their year group. Pupils' writing is sophisticated, demonstrating an ability to use language to create atmosphere and tone.
- Pupils write well for different purposes and in a variety of styles. For example, pupils in Year 4 wrote highly persuasive letters, demonstrating their ability to select words to convince the reader of their point of view. However, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills when learning in other subjects. This limits pupils' opportunities to further develop and hone their skills.
- The inspection also focused on leaders' work to improve the attendance of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils. All staff are fully aware of their role in promoting regular and punctual attendance and act swiftly when any pupil is absent. Special assemblies and individual awards contribute well to reducing absence. You and your staff work effectively with external agencies. Consequently, the level of persistent absence is declining and is now below national levels. You and the head of school have improved the attendance of pupils who are disadvantaged by working closely with their families. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' achievement is also improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in mathematics accelerates
- pupils further develop their writing skills in other 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

Richard Blackmore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your head of school to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I held a meeting with your English and mathematics leaders to discuss pupils' outcomes and the impact of leaders' actions on teaching and pupils' progress. I met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with a representative from the local authority. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information including: your records of monitoring and evaluation; the governing body's minutes of meetings; and the school's assessment information. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and information relating to attendance. We undertook observations of learning across the school together. I viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons.