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Mr Dan File  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr File

### **Short inspection of Elham Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 January 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Since joining the school in September 2014, you have determinedly built what one parent described as 'a united, strong team'. You effectively led the school through a period of staffing instability last year. You have also sustained a culture of caring and kindness throughout the school, in which every individual is valued and respected. Parents and pupils likened the school to 'a family, where everyone looks after each other'. Parents who are new to the school were keen to tell me how well their children had settled and how quickly support had been provided, where needed.

You have lost no time in ensuring that assessment in the early years and key stage 1 is more rigorous and accurate. In responding to a dip in standards at the end of key stage 1 in 2016, you have increased the pace of school improvement by appointing high-quality new staff. You have also moved existing staff to further strengthen teaching across the school. You have provided staff with additional support and training in the teaching of phonics, writing and mathematics. This has resulted in pupils making more rapid progress. You have very clear knowledge about what is needed for teaching and learning to be effective. When we observed lessons together, we agreed that most-able pupils could be challenged more effectively to enable them to make rapid progress. These pupils sometimes had to

wait before they were given even more challenging tasks.

You have developed staff's use of assessment information, resulting in increased progress and improved outcomes for pupils. Staff now have greater awareness of how groups of pupils are achieving, including those who are disadvantaged and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, interventions to support pupils at risk of falling behind are timely and effective. You recognise, however, that the school's improvement planning is not as clear as it could be. A greater focus on the progress that you expect groups of pupils to make will enable teachers and you to be held to account even more effectively.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths in the school, including pupils' behaviour and excellent attitudes to learning. You have been successful not only in maintaining these strengths, but taking them further. You have put in place strategies that develop pupils' determination and resilience. For example, pupils enjoy the challenge of devising their own 'Yes, I Can' pledges and when they succeed, they wear their 'Yes, I Can' badge with pride. Pupils are happy and focused in lessons and speak confidently about their achievements and what they are trying to do better. One pupil told me, 'Lessons are such fun I don't want to stop learning!' The school's values are very important to pupils and they wanted to tell me, very explicitly, what they are. Pupils have a mature understanding of what values such as humility, kindness and perseverance mean. They are very proud of their school and told me they did not want to change a thing about it.

You have addressed the areas for improvement identified by inspectors in 2013. Teaching assistants work effectively with individuals and groups of pupils, and are closely guided and monitored in their work. You and your leaders have provided teaching assistants with training in the teaching of mathematics, spelling, handwriting and writing. They also work successfully with individual pupils to remove barriers to learning, raising pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

At the last inspection, senior leaders and governors were also asked to enable pupils to discuss, improve and extend their work. Examples of this abound in pupils' writing. Pupils work well together, whether as discussion partners, or when assessing each other's work. They are very articulate when discussing their learning and thinking with an adult.

Securing consistent rates of progress in writing and mathematics across key stage 2 is developing. In key stage 2, pupils' progress in mathematics has been better than in writing. In Year 6, pupils are now making consistent rates of progress in both subjects, but more needs to be done to overcome any gaps in other year groups.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Every staff meeting begins with safeguarding updates and the sharing of key information to ensure the safety of all pupils. There are well-established

systems for raising concerns about individual pupils, and the progress of these pupils is carefully tracked by leaders. Detailed records are kept of how the school works with other agencies to protect pupils from neglect or abuse. The whole school community understands the importance of safeguarding and parents speak highly of the open and accessible lines of communication with staff. Parents especially appreciate the 'Drop In' zones, before and after school, enabling concerns to be dealt with as they arise. Pupils say they feel safe in school, and that rare instances of poor behaviour are dealt with quickly and fairly. Pupils like the 'STOP' (Several Times On Purpose) box outside the office where they can report concerns about bullying.

Checks on the suitability of staff are recorded appropriately. You have ensured that staff and governors have been thoroughly trained to understand changes in government advice about safeguarding soon after it is published. For example, all staff have been trained in fulfilling the 'Prevent' duty, and can assess risks related to radicalisation and extremism effectively. Those responsible for appointing new staff have a clear understanding of safe recruitment procedures.

### **Inspection findings**

- The focus of the inspection was to look at: the progress of key stage 1 pupils; the progress pupils are making in their writing compared to mathematics across the school; pupils' rates of absence; and whether disadvantaged pupils are achieving well.
- You were quite rightly concerned about the dip in standards at the end of the 2015/2016 academic year. The progress in writing for pupils at the end of key stage 2, in 2016, was below average, particularly for prior middle-attaining pupils. Your own assessment information and the work seen in pupils' books, indicates that progress has increased rapidly in key stages 1 and 2. Year 6 pupils have already exceeded ambitious targets set for them in writing and Year 3 pupils are making strong progress in their writing. Progress in writing is visible in pupils' books across year groups and subjects. Pupils edit their work effectively and know what they have to do to improve. However, more needs to be done to ensure that pupils achieve as well in writing as they do in other subjects.
- Senior leaders have worked in a cluster of seven local schools on the accuracy of moderation and what working at greater depth looks like in mathematics and writing. While this is feeding into planning, you recognise that the most able pupils do not always find work challenging enough.
- Improvement plans are ambitious, appropriate and shared with all staff and governors. However, some of the whole-school targets are too generic and do not take account of the starting points of some groups of pupils. Not all targets for groups are specific enough to be measurable.
- Children make good progress in the early years and assessment is accurate. Learning and progress is well documented in beautifully presented learning journey books, which are shared with parents and carers.
- The proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics

check reduced significantly last year. Targeted interventions and improved teaching of phonics have ensured that the current Year 1 pupils are making strong progress.

- Reading has been a priority and strength of the school over time. You have not been complacent about this. Pupils were keen to show me the new library and wider range of reading materials available to them. They enjoy coming into school before the start of the day to read and take part in online reading quizzes and challenges. Many pupils told me how they continue reading at home – so keen are they to progress to higher levels.
- The governing body is fully aware of key aspects of the school's work. New members have added significantly to the governing body's effectiveness. Governors carry out regular monitoring visits linked to the school development plan. This enables them to increasingly hold leaders to account.
- You have been relentless in tackling pupils' absence. Case study evidence shows that the school has given excellent targeted support to families to raise pupils' attendance levels. Overall attendance is now in line with, or above, national expectations for all but a very few pupils.
- You are determined that all pupils should excel. Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress in writing for these pupils now matches their rate of progress in mathematics. Progress overall in reading is above that expected. Additional support is targeted at removing barriers to learning through individual coaching and mentoring. Pupils say they feel valued and that this personalised attention helps their self-esteem and confidence.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement plans accurately reflect the school's strengths and areas for development, and focus sharply on the measurable progress of groups of pupils
- teachers consistently plan tasks which challenge the most able pupils, so that they make the rapid progress they are capable of
- the teaching of writing further strengthens to increase pupils' progress so that attainment in writing matches that of other subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Canterbury, 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 senior and middle leaders. 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 year groups. 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 observed behaviour at playtime. As well as talking to pupils in lessons, I met with a group of pupils from different year groups to talk about their learning. I jointly looked at a range of pupils' books with your middle and senior leaders. I viewed the 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 13 questionnaires from staff and 64 questionnaires from pupils. At the beginning of the day, I had conversations with parents and carers.