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Mrs Margaret Williams
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Williams

Short inspection of Bodiam Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 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 February 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's strong Christian ethos and values are very clear. Teaching is purposeful and meaningful. Through well-chosen activities and clear explanations, teachers highlight and reinforce key learning points for pupils. This helps pupils to develop a secure understanding of important concepts. Pupils are enthusiastic, extremely hard working and very positive about their learning. When visiting classrooms, I saw pupils consistently well engaged, and sometimes deeply engrossed, during lessons. Throughout the day, I observed nothing but impeccable behaviour. Pupils told me that this day was just like any other.

The rich, vibrant and exciting curriculum is a key strength of the school. Although the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is given rightful priority, this is not at the expense of learning across a broad range of other subjects. Staff make careful and appropriate links between subjects to help learning to make sense and be memorable for pupils. 'Reveal days' help to stimulate pupils' curiosity in new topics and teachers use the questions that pupils pose as a result to help to shape their subsequent learning. Pupils take genuine care in producing some beautiful work across subjects.

Following the previous inspection, leaders were asked to raise pupils' attainment at key stage 1. You have led staff to address this issue very successfully. Children in Reception join in enthusiastically with activities and, when the time is right, listen attentively to the teacher. The rich range of their experiences, reflective of the

quality of the curriculum right across the school, supports the strides that they take in their first year. They are well prepared for Year 1. Across the rest of the school, pupils progress well. The pride that they take in presenting their work is commendable. Looking at their books, the progress that pupils make is easily identifiable, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Rates of progress are sometimes understandably less rapid for these pupils, depending on their particular needs and starting points. This is because, in mathematics for example, sometimes pupils need more practice in different ways to really understand the concepts and tasks. Rightly, teachers focus strongly on securing pupils' conceptual understanding, including through using apparatus and visual images, rather than getting the correct answer. When gradually increasing the level of challenge, they respond quickly to address thoroughly any misconceptions that emerge. Overall, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities typically make broadly similar progress to other pupils. However, we agreed that there was scope to take a more structured and systematic approach to working with parents in providing and evaluating support for these pupils.

Historically, the school has been affected by unusually high numbers of pupils arriving or leaving in the middle of their schooling. Making sure that they make the best possible progress over a prolonged period has therefore been a real challenge. You have worked hard to overcome this by making the school a popular choice. The number of pupils in lower year groups has risen markedly and the school roll is rising fast. We discussed how the benefits of this greater stability lower down the school need time to filter through to older year groups to secure the best possible outcomes by the time pupils move on to their secondary schools.

Indicative of your continuous drive for improvement, you identified that pupils were falling back in their learning over the summer break, especially when this coincided with a move between classes and key stages. You and your team are working closely with parents and pupils this year to make the transition as smooth as possible. Similarly, there is a combined and relentless effort to build on the improvements made this year in improving pupils' attendance rates.

Governance is effective. Governors are ambitious for the school and its pupils, thinking strategically about how best to sustain and build on previous successes. For example, the previous benefits achieved through close partnership working with another school have been formalised in a federation with a single governing body. Governors are knowledgeable and realistic about the school's current effectiveness. They are frank about what is going well and what could be even better. Parents expressed mixed views about the school. They have been consulted on aspects of the school's work, such as the ongoing transition project, but there have been no recent surveys by leaders or governors about parents' wider views.

Safeguarding is effective.

That everyone is aware of the need to 'think the unthinkable' was a constant theme running through my discussions with staff, school leaders and governors. Staff follow the school's policies and procedures well to report any concerns that they

identify about pupils' welfare or well-being. Written records about any such concerns and the actions taken are thorough. Evidence shows that leaders work closely with families for the safety and protection of the school's pupils. Leaders make ready use of the local authority's 'single point of access' to other agencies and professionals where they think more help is needed. The well-maintained single central register of staff pre-employment checks meets and exceeds all statutory requirements. The regular audit checks by leaders and governors help to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

The school has an overwhelmingly positive and friendly atmosphere. As I observed and chatted with pupils, including during lunchtime, they were relaxed and happy. However, the relatively low number of parents who responded to Parent View expressed very mixed views of how effectively the school deals with bullying. Parents who spoke with me reported that either they were unaware of any issues regarding bullying or that these are low level and dealt with effectively. School documents show that allegations of bullying are recorded, investigated and reported to the governing body. Governors are not dismissive of the issue. They question and challenge leaders about follow-up procedures. Although not at all in denial that incidents sometimes occur, they firmly believe that any issues are predominantly isolated and not part of the culture. Taking all of the available evidence into account, I agree.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I explored with you a number of key threads in order to confirm that the school remains good. With such low numbers in some year groups, comparing pupils' results year-on-year can be very misleading. I wanted to know whether disadvantaged pupils and the most able do well enough. I also wanted to check the success of your work to improve pupils' attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result of the mixed views expressed by parents, I focused on bullying as part of my examination of safeguarding procedures.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. As with other pupils, they are industrious and take a pride in their work. The number of disadvantaged pupils in each year group is exceptionally low. This makes year-on-year comparisons about how well they do compared with other pupils nationally completely unreliable. However, evident improvements in their books reflect the strong progress that disadvantaged pupils usually make. Consequently, in most cases they are catching up with other pupils nationally. Leaders put the relatively modest amount of additional funding to good use, for example providing additional individual or small group help to tackle quickly any emerging underachievement. Leaders and teachers review the difference that this support makes in a timely manner.
- I saw clear evidence that teachers routinely challenge the most able pupils. Examples include asking pupils to use their evaluative skills, comparing and contrasting ideas or explaining their reasoning in detail. In science, from a young age, most-able pupils are stretched to explain the reasons behind predictions or to make and write their own conclusions from investigations. However, the

challenge for the most able pupils is less consistently strong in some subjects than it is in English and mathematics. You are well aware of this and the work to address it is already underway.

- The most able pupils make good progress. The proportion reaching higher standards or working at greater depth at the end of key stage 1 has risen steadily over time. The school's own assessment information indicates that this trend is set to continue. In recent years, Year 6 leavers have typically reached expected standards but, despite pupils' good progress from their particular starting points, few have exceeded this. This is because pupils have made similar progress to other pupils nationally, but have not made more substantial progress over a sufficiently long period to gain more ground.
- You have made improving attendance a rightful key priority this year. In recent years, too many pupils have missed too much school. Leaders and staff emphasise the importance of coming to school every day and pursue reasons for absence vigorously. The tenacity of you and your team is paying off. The figures that you provided show that overall attendance has risen much closer to previous national averages this year. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils in particular has shown a marked improvement, with a more modest increase for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Also, considerably fewer pupils than previously are frequently absent. However, although moving strongly in the right direction, attendance figures are still not in line with previous national averages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strong progress of current pupils is sustained so that more pupils are working at a higher standard or demonstrating deeper learning when they move on to their secondary schools
- they build on recent improvements to bring attendance figures at least in line with national averages, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- they strengthen links with parents to share the school's good work and give full consideration to parents' views, including about support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Clive Dunn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, you accompanied me as I visited all classes to observe teaching and learning. While in class, I looked closely at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning. In addition, I scrutinised a range of pupils' work separately that was gathered at my request and selected by me. I held various meetings and informal discussions with you, other leaders, staff and governors. I telephoned a representative of the local authority. At lunchtime, I spoke with a wide range of pupils on the playground. There were 16 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including a number of written comments. I took account of all of these, alongside the views of approximately a dozen parents whom I spoke to informally at the start of the day. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire, but I analysed 12 confidential questionnaires returned by staff. Before visiting the school, I reviewed the school's website and a variety of information about the school's performance over time. On site, I scrutinised safeguarding arrangements and sampled other documentation relevant to the lines of enquiry that I pursued.