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24 July 2017

Mrs Gemma Hitch
Headteacher
Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hitch

Short inspection of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 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 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. You joined the school in January 2016, after a period of interim leadership. Over the last five terms, you have recruited a new team of teaching staff to work with you. You have a new early years teacher joining you in September 2017. Over time, you have managed the underperformance of teachers and subject leaders effectively.

You have maintained the strengths identified in the last inspection. Laddingford is a happy, harmonious and inclusive school. Your 'anti-bullying ambassadors' instigated a celebratory display of pupils' interests outside school. The words, 'we are each unique and beautiful but together we are a masterpiece' strike you as you enter the school from the playground. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and respectful. Pupils are proud of their school and their achievements. This inspection took place the day after the Year 6 performance of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about their play and reflected that they 'had never been in a play like that before'. You are raising the aspirations of pupils, particularly the most vulnerable.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to provide even more

stimulating learning experiences. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about learning, particularly art. The quality of the pupils' artwork that features in corridor and classroom displays is stunning. Pupils over time develop exceptional skills as they sketch, shade and paint to a very high standard.

Pupils' behaviour is good. The local authority is clear that you have improved this aspect of the school. Pupils know, understand and follow the new effective system for managing behaviour. Pupils play together well and have a clear understanding about respect and tolerance. You work effectively with parents and other agencies to support pupils who find managing their own feelings difficult.

Governors have a clear understanding of what the school is doing well and what the next steps are. Governors monitor the impact of leaders' work well. Governors track the improvement milestones in strategic plans effectively. Visits to the school are sharply focused on improvement and governors ask searching questions of school leaders. Governors have made a conscious decision to buy in additional support for the headteacher to improve pupils' levels of attendance. This is beginning to have a positive impact. However, there is still more to do to ensure that more pupils come to school regularly.

You know the school's strengths and which aspects can be even better. Mathematics has not been well led or taught over time. The new mathematics leader has begun to have a positive impact. However, the development of pupils' mathematical reasoning skills remains your focus for school improvement.

Your self-evaluation of the school is accurate. Children in the early years are not always well supported or challenged enough in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders have created a culture where pupils' safety and well-being are given the highest priority. Leaders and staff with a named responsibility for keeping pupils safe keep detailed and clear records of all concerns regarding pupils. All communications and decisions leaders make are recorded and logged meticulously.

Leaders work effectively with a wide range of partner agencies, including the local authority. Referrals to secure additional support for families are thorough and timely. Leaders tenaciously follow up their referrals if they do not feel that other agencies have been quick enough or accurate in their assessments of pupils' well-being. Pupils feel safe in school, which concurs with what staff and parents say.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I looked at: the progress that the most able key stage 1 pupils make in English; the progress that key stage 2 pupils are making in mathematics; and the impact of leaders' actions on improving pupils' attendance levels.
- Pupils who had left the early years having reached a good level of development make good progress in their reading and writing in key stage 1. Some pupils in Year 1 are making rapid progress and are now writing at greater depth. Pupils use and apply their phonic knowledge well and write using increasingly complex vocabulary and grammar. Pupils' spelling is good. Pupils who arrive in key stage 1 having not attended school before make striking progress in English.
- Mathematics has not been well led over time. Historically, key stage 2 pupils have not made good enough progress. Current key stage 2 pupils are making better progress, particularly pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5. New leaders recognised that the school was not well resourced to systematically teach calculation across the school. Leaders have rectified this and key stage 2 pupils are making good progress in their calculation work. Pupils are beginning to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills. However, this work is not yet well embedded. As a result, current Year 6 pupils have made inconsistent progress.
- The school has a high proportion of pupils who join the school through key stage 2. Some pupils have been to many schools or have had limited schooling. As a result, some pupils have significant gaps in their mathematical understanding. Leaders use pupil premium funding effectively to employ a specialist teacher who both identifies gaps and teaches pupils key knowledge, such as multiplication tables. As a result, pupils who are not working at age-related expectations are making good progress.
- Leaders are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' attendance. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is declining. Leaders work well with other agencies, including social care, to ensure that the most effective strategies to improve pupils' attendance are deployed. However, the overall attendance levels for all pupils are not improving quickly enough.
- The local authority provides effective support to the school. Leaders have valued the opportunity to visit other schools and learn from more experienced leaders. Advisers have a clear view regarding the positive impact of the new headteacher and what is still to be done.
- The local authority has worked well with leaders to improve the early years provision, for example in beginning to develop the outdoor learning space. However, the activities offered to children are not as exciting or challenging as they should be. For example, there are not enough opportunities for children to write in the environment. Leaders know this. Planned learning does not always build on what children know and can do. As a result, children do not always make the progress of which they are capable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in key stage 2 have greater opportunities to develop their mathematical problem-solving skills and reasoning
- children in the early years are provided with stimulating resources and teaching that challenges and extends their learning
- more pupils come to school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Cole
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and governors to review your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I accompanied you to all classes. We evaluated a range of work in pupils' books. I spoke to an adviser from the local authority. I spoke to pupils around the school, including at break- and lunchtime. I scrutinised 25 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and reviewed four staff survey returns. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements, including those related to recruitment.