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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Katie Gray
Executive Headteacher
Branscombe Church of England Primary School
Branscombe
Seaton
Devon
EX12 3DA

Dear Mrs Gray

Short inspection of Branscombe Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 October 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 have taken swift action to tackle the dip in standards that occurred in 2016. The dip was due to the higher expectations of the revised national curriculum and an influx of new pupils across the school. Information about the 2017 outcomes indicates that pupils are again achieving well overall by the time they leave the school. Currently, most pupils are making good progress in reading. Their progress in mathematics is improving rapidly because of the training and support you have provided for the staff. You have identified accurately the need for further improvement in pupils' writing. To help to achieve this, you are ensuring that teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills independently across subjects. This was something the school was asked to improve at the previous inspection.

You have successfully created an inclusive ethos in which all pupils are valued. Your commitment to nurturing pupils' personal development, as well as their academic skills, is shared by all staff. It is appreciated by parents, particularly parents whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Parents praise the teachers and teaching assistants for the care and support they provide for their children and for the way in which they develop the children's enthusiasm for learning.

As the executive headteacher of the three small Church of England primary schools in the Jubilee Federation, you draw successfully on their combined resources including staff expertise. The expertise of the shared head of teaching and learning has improved provision, including in the early years, which recently expanded to take in nursery-aged children. The governing body of the federation has a good understanding of the strengths and priorities for improvement in the school. Governors fulfil their role effectively in holding you to account for the standards that pupils achieve.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and appropriate records are maintained. You, governors and staff are well trained in keeping children safe. All the required checks on adults who work with the children are carried out and recorded well. The comprehensive and up-to-date policy and procedures for child protection and safeguarding are understood and implemented effectively by all staff.

A few parents reported that you and the governors have not responded appropriately to their concerns about their children's safety following incidents of physical bullying. You are rightly drawing on the support of the local authority to improve the procedures for managing pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Training from the authority's behaviour support team is enabling staff to make suitable provision for these pupils and to ensure the safety of all pupils. Pupils report that they feel safe in school and that teachers are good at resolving issues of bullying.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, my first line of enquiry was to explore how successfully leaders and managers are improving progress for all pupils, especially for disadvantaged pupils and the most able. This is because published performance information in 2016 showed a decline in both key stages 1 and 2. Outcomes for pupils in key stage 2 were below average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Few of the most able pupils exceeded the expected standards.
- You explained that the year groups involved in the 2016 national tests and assessments included pupils who had recently joined the school and/or had special educational needs and/or disabilities. They accounted for a significant proportion of pupils in the small cohorts. While these pupils did not reach the expected standards, the school's information shows that most made strong progress from their various starting points.
- A further contributing factor to the dip in results was the higher expectations of achievement in the revised national curriculum. You ensured that teachers received effective training from the local authority to help them to secure better outcomes. For example, in the end of key stage 2 tests in 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was above the national figure. The pupils' test scores were above

average in reading and average in mathematics. However, outcomes in writing remained below average.

- Most pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able, are currently making good progress in reading and mathematics. They are making slower progress in writing. You have identified accurately writing as a priority for school improvement alongside further improvement in mathematics.
- The inspection's second line of enquiry was to look at what leaders and managers are doing to increase the proportion of pupils, especially the most able, who are achieving greater depth in their learning, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- You identified, rightly, that the areas of weakness in mathematics relate to problem-solving and reasoning. Training in mathematics has led to improvements in teachers' subject knowledge. This enables the teachers to challenge current pupils to explain their reasoning and to solve problems of increasing complexity. Pupils say that they enjoy the greater challenge in their work.
- Pupils are beginning to improve the presentation of their work and to join their handwriting with better control. They are gaining confidence in writing at greater length in a range of subjects. However, they are not yet progressing quickly enough in extending the vocabulary they use or writing more complex sentences. For some pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, spelling is a struggle. The actions in the school improvement plan focus appropriately on challenging pupils to produce increasingly sophisticated and complex writing.
- The final line of enquiry was to examine how well phonics is taught in the early years and key stage 1.
- Over time, the achievement of children in the early years foundation stage has gone from strength to strength. In 2015 and 2016, it was well above average, including in reading.
- The flying start in reading in the early years has not been sustained consistently in key stage 1. The 2015 early years cohort achieved below the national figure in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2016. The school's information indicates similar results in 2017.
- Most of the current pupils in key stage 1 can draw on their knowledge of phonics to read fluently. However, some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not developing their knowledge of letters and sounds well enough to read unfamiliar words. Their limited understanding of phonics also hinders their progress in spelling.
- To improve the teaching and learning of phonics, teachers are now assessing more accurately pupils' starting points so that they provide work at the right level of challenge.
- You have recently introduced a new system for tracking pupils' progress. This provides much clearer information about the progress of different groups of pupils in different subjects from year to year. Teachers say that this helps them to plan lessons more effectively to meet the needs of all pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make consistently good progress in writing throughout the school by:
 - extending their range and use of vocabulary
 - developing their ability to form sentences of increasing complexity
 - gaining a good understanding of phonics and using this to improve their spelling, especially 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 Exeter, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, the head of teaching and learning, teachers, some pupils and parents. I received telephone calls from a representative of the local authority and the federation's chair of governors. I met with another governor. Together, you and I observed pupils' learning in the two classes and examined a sample of work in pupils' books. I also listened to some pupils reading. I examined documents, including those relating to pupils' progress, behaviour and the safeguarding of pupils. In addition, I took account of the 11 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey and several written responses from parents, three responses to the online staff survey and four responses to the online pupil survey.