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Mr John Moore
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Moore

Short inspection of Sherborne Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 July 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 your appointment in September 2016 you have made significant improvements to this small village school. You have not been afraid to challenge where you have judged standards to be too low and so the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has risen rapidly. You have overhauled assessment procedures, updated the curriculum and raised teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour. Consequently, pupils' experience of school has improved and so has their achievement.

Pupils work well together in their mixed-age classes. Teachers are adept at planning activities that meet the different needs of pupils. The proportion of pupils who achieved a good level of development in the Reception Year was around the national average in 2016 but was above average last year. In key stage 2, pupils' progress was average in 2016; however, pupils' progress was stronger last year, particularly in writing. The family atmosphere at the school helps to motivate pupils. Your teachers know the pupils very well and provide a wide range of interesting learning experiences for them. You have ensured that sport is a particular strength of the school. Pupils have performed at county level in athletics, hockey and mountain biking.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to increase pupils' independence,

improve their engagement with learning and raise the quality of senior leaders' planning. You have been successful in each area. During the inspection, pupils demonstrated their tenacity and independent thinking by solving engineering challenges. Your new behaviour policy, and more interesting learning experiences, have ensured that pupils are engaged consistently in their work. You have introduced improvement plans that are detailed and fit for purpose. Governors and staff contribute to these plans and so the school community understands the improvement priorities for the school well.

Pupils' progress in key stage 1 was not strong enough in the past. You have taken action to improve the quality of teaching in the early years and key stage 1. As a result, current Year 1 and Year 2 pupils are making better progress, particularly in developing early reading skills. You recognise that some key stage 2 pupils are not yet fluent readers because they have not caught up with the basic skills they need. Pupils enjoy writing. Most are enthusiastic writers and are making strong progress in key stage 2. However, some pupils do not routinely reflect on their writing to consider how they could improve it.

You manage the performance of staff well and provide suitable training opportunities for them. Their development targets are well matched to the priorities of the school. Staff feel included and valued. Consequently, your commitment to providing a broad experience for pupils is shared by all staff. You have taken steps to remind parents and pupils of the importance of regular attendance at school. Rates of pupils' attendance have risen in the last year and are now in line with the national average. Parents are very supportive of the school, and would recommend it to others. As a result of the confidence parents have in the school, the school is growing.

Safeguarding is effective.

You place a high priority on safeguarding. Staff know the pupils well, and, because of the frequent updates they receive, they understand the risks posed to pupils. As a result, you have ensured a vigilant safeguarding culture at the school.

You have reviewed and enhanced the safeguarding policy and procedures at the school. Appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited and staff training is up to date. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of high quality. You communicate well with outside agencies when the need arises.

Pupils feel safe in school. All the parents who replied to the online questionnaire, Parent View, believe that their child is safe and well cared for at school. Bullying rarely occurs, but pupils have great confidence in their teachers to deal with it when it does. The school's curriculum helps pupils to develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. Pupils are able to avoid the risks of using the internet because they have been given good advice about how to protect personal information.

Inspection findings

- The chair of the governing body took up his role two years ago. Since then, the governing body has become increasingly effective in holding senior leaders to account for the standard of education at the school. Governors are engaging in training to develop their skills further. The new headteacher communicates well with governors and provides them with accurate information about the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, they have good evidence on which to base decisions about the future of the school.
- To decide if the school remained good, the first line of enquiry evaluated the quality of phonics teaching in the early years and key stage 1. In 2017, the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics was below average. Some pupils' pronunciation of the sounds associated with particular letters was not accurate, and so these pupils struggled to blend sounds together to form words. As a result of better teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1, current pupils' pronunciation is more precise. Teaching has enabled pupils to grasp basic sounds well, and so pupils form whole words more readily. Teaching assistants support pupils well; however, they are not yet skilled enough in developing pupils' phonic knowledge.
- The second line of enquiry centred on pupils' progress in reading in Years 3 and 4. Many pupils enjoy reading and can confidently describe their favourite authors and genres. Displays around the school encourage and inspire pupils to read, and parents are involved in promoting reading well. Teaching is systematically helping pupils to develop their reading, for example, improving their comprehension skills. However, some pupils did not gain sufficient mastery of basic reading skills in key stage 1, and so they are less confident readers now.
- The third line of enquiry concentrated on pupils' progress in writing in Years 5 and 6. Teaching is providing pupils with a good understanding of how to improve their work and pupils appreciate the detailed help they receive. Pupils are able to write successfully in different styles, for example, poetry, stories and formal letters. Pupils' progress in writing was well above average in 2017, and most current pupils are continuing to make strong progress. Some pupils, though, do not proofread their writing sufficiently to correct mistakes and look for improvements.
- The final line of enquiry weighed up the effectiveness of senior leaders' work to provide a broad curriculum for pupils. Senior leaders strive to ensure that pupils experience a rich variety of activities. For example, during the inspection, pupils in one class took part in a cookery workshop with an outside speaker. Other pupils were preparing for the visit of a firefighter the following day. As a result of visits such as these, and through their day-to-day learning, pupils are given a wide view of life in modern Britain. Teachers use the rich variety of wildlife in the local area to stimulate pupils' learning well. Pupils are regularly involved in projects with schools from other European countries. Consequently, pupils are able to appreciate their own environment and communicate confidently with children from very different settings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching assistants' skills in teaching phonics are developed further
- pupils' phonic knowledge in Years 3 and 4 is developed so that all pupils have the basic skills necessary to be confident readers
- pupils in key stage 2 evaluate and edit their writing effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, three governors, and the deputy headteacher. I observed pupils learning in lessons and looked at examples of pupils' work. I met with pupils from the school council and spoke with other pupils during lessons. I scrutinised a variety of documents including the school's development plan, the school's own evaluation of its performance, minutes of governors' meetings, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to attendance. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from nine pupils and I also considered responses from 13 parents.