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Mrs Karen Davis
Executive Headteacher
St Michael's Easthampstead Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Davis

Short inspection of St Michael's Easthampstead Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 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 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 as an interim executive headteacher in September 2017 at a time of some turbulence in staffing. Together with senior leaders, you have quickly galvanised the staff team by reinforcing the high expectations that have made the school successful in recent years. Staff morale is high and all who responded to the staff survey said that they are proud to work at St Michael's and enjoy working there.

Parents are very positive about the school because pupils enjoy coming to school, feel safe and are taken good care of. One parent commented, 'My children go into school with a smile and come home with one.' The overwhelming majority of parents who expressed an opinion echoed this view. Pupils also enthuse about the school and the interesting learning opportunities that teachers provide. Pupils mostly work hard, enjoy learning and take pride in their achievements. Staff are swift to recognise when pupils have done well and reward them. This fuels pupils' enthusiasm and drives them on towards further success. Pupils behave well, treating each other and staff with kindness and respect. As a result, the school feels like a happy, harmonious family.

Children get off to a good start in the early years and make strong progress in their first year in school. They quickly learn to cooperate and get on well together.

Teachers provide many interesting and challenging activities which develop children's skills, engage their curiosity and sustain their interest for quite long periods of time. Proportions of children achieving a good level of development are above those seen nationally. The teaching of phonics is also highly effective. Almost all pupils achieved the expected standard by the end of Year 1 in 2017.

During your last inspection, inspectors asked leaders to accelerate pupils' progress by securing a greater proportion of outstanding teaching throughout the school. In the last three years, pupils at the school have achieved outcomes well above those seen nationally at the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2. These high standards have been the result of effective teaching and leaders' high expectations. Inspectors also asked leaders to raise standards and achievement by setting specific, measurable targets for improvement and evaluating their effect more regularly. The school development plans are thorough and detailed, and focus on the most important areas for improvement – especially the quality of teaching. Senior leaders divide long-term plans into termly targets with measurable success criteria. This enables leaders and governors to focus clearly on the most important areas for improving the school and to check that their actions are having the intended impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding receives a high profile in the school because leaders understand their vital role in keeping pupils safe. Policies, procedures and protocols are detailed and well understood by staff. Some minor administrative errors were found in the single central register, but these were corrected by the end of the inspection. All staff receive regular training to ensure that they are fully equipped with the latest guidance and advice to enable them to take good care of pupils. Staff are diligent in raising any concerns about a pupil. They understand the importance of immediately recording their concern in writing as well as speaking to a senior leader.

Pupils feel completely safe. They say that staff take good care of them and that they have the utmost confidence in adults in the school to address issues such as thoughtless behaviour quickly and effectively. Bullying is rare and is quickly sorted out by staff. Teachers ensure that pupils learn how to stay safe in a range of situations including on the road, in a fire and online. Pupils understand the risks associated with being online and are clear about how to stay safe. They know exactly what to do if they encounter anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Leaders regularly engage with parents to keep them up to date with the latest guidance on e-safety.

Governors play an effective role in safeguarding pupils by undertaking careful checks in school. These checks include ensuring that only suitable people can work in the school and making sure that the internet service provided to pupils is properly filtered from harmful content.

Inspection findings

- At our initial meeting, we agreed to follow three lines of enquiry that I had identified. The first of these explored the effectiveness of leaders' and governors' actions in maintaining the high levels of attainment and securing consistently good teaching during a turbulent time. Senior leaders, governors and the local authority are very clear about the potential negative impact of the recent changes in staffing. Almost half of the teaching staff are new to the school and your role as executive headteacher is a temporary one until the new headteacher starts in January 2018. However, you have demonstrated strong, decisive leadership and, together with the deputy and assistant headteachers, have steadied the ship and united the new staff team.
- Senior and middle leaders have an accurate understanding of what constitutes good-quality teaching. You quickly identified some areas of weakness, especially in the practice of teachers newer to the school, and swiftly implemented support plans to bring about rapid improvements. There is already clear evidence of this programme of support having a strongly positive impact on the quality of teaching. Teachers who receive support and mentorship value the way that these are helping them to improve. One explained to me that she now focuses much more clearly on identifying and meeting pupils' needs in her lessons. While teaching is improving substantially this term, work still needs to be done to ensure that pupils make rapid progress. Occasionally pupils lose interest because they find the work too easy or too hard, and so they lose focus and their progress slows.
- Second, we agreed to investigate how well teaching enables pupils to achieve the highest standards in writing at the end of key stage 2. In 2017, percentages of pupils in Year 6 achieving the higher score in reading and mathematics were well above those seen nationally. In writing, far fewer pupils achieved the greater-depth standard, although a much higher proportion are on track to achieve it this year.
- Teachers use interesting topics to spark pupils' interest in writing, such as the Tay Bridge disaster, rainforest creatures and a video clip called 'The Piano'. Where the teaching of writing is most effective, pupils build and apply their skills by regularly writing independently. For example, we saw Year 6 pupils write beautifully crafted pieces about an elderly man's thoughts at the end of his life. These pupils showed skill, stamina and flair, which had been achieved through having regular opportunities to develop the craft of writing. However, there is not enough of a consistent challenge throughout key stage 2 to ensure that the most able pupils achieve the greater-depth standard. At times, teachers depend too much on pupils marking each other's writing. Pupils are not regularly held to account for simple errors in spelling and punctuation, so these mistakes persist.
- Finally, we agreed to look at leaders' work to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils so that they can achieve as well as other pupils nationally. Senior leaders recognise that, last year, disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as other pupils by the end of Year 6. Leaders have a clear and accurate picture of the needs and abilities of disadvantaged pupils and use the pupil premium funding effectively. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo)

and family support adviser work closely together to ensure that pupils attend school regularly and that their needs are met. Senior leaders have invested wisely in providing support from trained teachers to support pupils both during lessons and out of class. As a result, disadvantaged pupils currently in Year 6 are on track to achieve at least in line with other pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils across the school are also typically achieving as well as their classmates.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers consistently challenge the most able pupils in writing so that more achieve the higher standard by the end of key stage 2
- the current support being provided for teachers new to the school leads to rapid progress for all groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy and assistant headteachers, five members of the governing body and a member of the local authority. I also met with the SENCo and the family support adviser. I visited all classes with you to observe teaching and learning, to talk to pupils and to look at their work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at playtime and lunchtime. I spoke to several pupils on the playground both at lunchtime and at morning play. I took into account 13 responses to the staff survey and 68 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents at the beginning of the day. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, school improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.