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6 November 2017

Mr Matthew Clark
Headteacher
West Malling Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School and Language Unit
Old Cricket Ground
Norman Road
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Kent
ME19 6RL

Dear Mr Clark

Short inspection of West Malling Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School and Language Unit

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 May 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 taking up your appointment in September 2015, you have established a successful working relationship with the trust, governing body and staff. School leaders know the school well and have a shared vision. You and governors are keen to seek opportunities to work with other schools and have recently joined Tenax, a multi-academy trust. Staff enjoy working at the school and are proud to be part of an effective team. Collectively, you have the confidence of parents, carers and the wider community to lead the school forward.

The school is a welcoming environment where staff know pupils individually. Pupils are cared for effectively. Staff work closely together to make sure that each pupil gets the support they need. As a result, pupils settle into school quickly. They behave well and enjoy their time in school.

During my time in classrooms, I saw that pupils are keen to learn. Teachers are enthusiastic and pupils follow guidance attentively. Staff question pupils skilfully to help them think more deeply and learn quickly. Pupils enjoy taking part in a range of activities, for example listening to a character description from Roald Dahl or solving number puzzles. As a result, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is good.

Pupils are polite; they speak happily and confidently about their school. Pupils were keen to tell me about work they find tricky and how it makes them think more carefully. They enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including Zumba, gardening and kick-boxing, which contribute effectively to their learning.

Leaders have maintained the many strengths recognised at the last inspection. The strengths identified included the strong sense of teamwork and shared goals, the quality of teaching, resulting in pupils' good rates of progress, and pupils' good attitudes and behaviour. At the last inspection, inspectors also identified the need to ensure more outstanding teaching across the school and that pupils' progress in writing matched that in reading. Pupils now have more opportunities to write at length across a range of styles and, as a result, overall outcomes for writing are now similar to those in other schools nationally. However, as we agreed, teaching is still not consistently outstanding. This is because teachers' expectations vary, especially for the most able pupils in writing and mathematics.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the process of self-evaluation to identify priorities and improve the school. You and other leaders can describe the school's many strengths accurately, as well as the areas that need to be improved. For example, you have rightly identified the need to focus on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, including maximising their attendance. You also wish to accelerate the progress of the most able pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

This is a caring school. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are trained at an appropriate level and records are up to date. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about a child, and they work with outside agencies as needed.

Pupils know that they can talk to staff if they have any concerns and are confident that action will be taken. The curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe. They talk confidently about e-safety and the importance of not putting personal information online.

The school is maintained well and is being improved constantly. The addition of the awning outside the early years area means that the children can learn safely outdoors in all weathers.

The school website contains a range of useful safety information for parents. All parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire are confident that their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, my focus areas were: how effectively school leaders are continuing to raise standards in writing, phonics and mathematics at key stage 1; the progress of disadvantaged pupils across the school; and how successfully the

school is maximising the attendance of all pupils.

- Leaders have rightly identified that progress in writing and mathematics needs to improve further. A new system has been introduced to help pupils write at greater length in a range of styles. Consequently, standards in writing are rising.
- In mathematics, pupils have recently been given more opportunities to solve problems and develop reasoning skills. Work is planned to help pupils progress from their different starting points. Pupils say that they enjoy being challenged, but would like their maths to be even harder.
- These developments mean that most pupils are making stronger progress in writing and mathematics, both in the main school and in the language unit. However, these changes have only taken place recently. There is still more to be done to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged consistently to reach the higher standards of which they are capable.
- Leaders use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils well. Staff use tracking information accurately to identify where pupils need to catch up. Support is provided effectively for families, and extra adults work successfully with disadvantaged pupils in class and groups. Consequently, many disadvantaged pupils make good progress. However, too few of the most able disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress to achieve the high standard.
- Pupils enjoy practising their phonics in sessions matched closely to their individual needs. Skilful questioning by staff moves learning forward rapidly. Consequently, more pupils are achieving standards in phonics that are typical for their age.
- Attendance of all pupils is similar to that of other schools. However, the school has recognised the need to improve attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff provide support for pupils with low attendance and collect them from home if needed. Pupils appreciate the stickers and certificates given as rewards for attending school. As a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has recently started to rise.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils, including those that are from disadvantaged backgrounds, are challenged consistently to enable them to achieve higher standards in writing and mathematics
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs/and or disabilities improves to match that of other pupils nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Addison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the chair of the governing body and six other governors, and a group of pupils. I also met with a representative of the diocese and the executive headteacher of the multi-academy trust. I spoke on the telephone to the trust's chief executive. You accompanied me on visits to all classrooms, where I spoke to pupils and assessed their work. I looked at a range of mathematics and writing books. I observed pupils' behaviour in the classrooms and around the school. I took into account 63 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 56 free-text responses. I also considered 21 online questionnaires from staff and 51 from pupils. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, the school's website, safety records, minutes of meetings, various policies and pupil progress information.