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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Wendy Stone
Headteacher
Minster Church of England Primary School
Molineux Road
Minster-in-Thanel
Ramsgate
Kent
CT12 4PS

Dear Mrs Stone

Short inspection of Minster Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained, and continues to improve relentlessly, the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have built a strong leadership team whose members are fully committed to Minster Church of England Primary School. You are dedicated to the pupils, determined that all will succeed. Leadership of the school is conducted without fuss and with considerable skill. Over time, you have created some unique features of the school such as the 'Minster Learning Model', a secure way of arranging teaching and learning, the 'learning pit', a helpful tool to enable pupils to describe how they are feeling about the difficulty of a task, and the 'Minster vibe', a collection of comments about things that are going well for the school and individual pupils. Each of these contribute in their own way to an enriching learning experience for pupils.

Pupils benefit from secure and effective teaching in every class. The teaching team is unusually stable and this means that effort you put into staff training, or coaching, produces lasting outcomes. You have clear expectations for all staff. Everybody knows what to do and how to carry out their duties efficiently. As a result, teaching is of a good standard across the school. Teachers share planning and preparation but they all put their own stamp on each lesson. They all possess good subject knowledge and the skills necessary to ensure pupils' strong progress. Teaching assistants share this work and support learning well. Most parents agree that the range of extra, specialist or narrowly focused teaching for some pupils means that few fall behind and those with lower starting points catch up quickly.

Leaders, and those responsible for governance, make sure that each pupil's individual skills, gifts, talents and prior learning are known. Leaders use technology sensibly to keep thorough records of each pupil's progress and attainment. Information derived from the many data sources is used skilfully to identify any pupils who need extra help, to organise pupils into groups for learning and to forecast likely outcomes at the end of each sequence of learning.

You hold teachers increasingly well to account for pupils' progress. Your regular meetings with staff to discuss how well pupils are doing have proved to be successful. These meetings are a helpful means of checking that learning is now at the right pace to meet raised standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

All of the school's work is based on Christian values. Visibly, the collective act of worship at the end of each day provides pupils with a chance to reflect or pray. It contributes well to pupils' spiritual development. Less visible, but nonetheless significant, is the threading of Christian beliefs through the approaches to learning and pastoral care that characterise the school. Many of the school's policies and practices are strengthened by biblical texts, so that by the end of their time in school, pupils have a good grounding in the Christian faith. Pupils sang enthusiastically during the collective act of worship on the day of the inspection. The school's religious education programme complements this work. The programme enables pupils rightly to learn about other faith traditions in the United Kingdom. This prepares pupils appropriately for contemporary life.

All adults contribute significantly to pupils' reading. Leaders are justifiably proud of the refurbished library which has a growing supply of lending and reference books. Leaders provide a range of activities which both encourage a love of books and reading and nurture those who find reading more difficult. Many parents commented positively on the help they receive for supporting the development of reading at home.

Despite all this good work, we agreed that disadvantaged pupils' performance, including their attendance, is not as good as it could be. You had already identified this as a major focus for improvement work in the present year. Leaders are constantly striving to raise even further teachers' expectations, so that even more pupils, including those who are most able, aim for the highest possible levels of attainment.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders' work to keep pupils safe is a real strength of the school. As a stranger, it is impossible to enter the premises without permission. The site is extremely secure. Checks on anyone wishing to work at, volunteer, or simply visit the school are carried out vigorously. All statutory safeguarding checks are carried out with a high degree of rigour.

Leaders also ensure that pupils' behaviour is sufficiently good to mean that incidents are few. Pupils told me that bullying rarely happens but that when it does occur, it

is dealt with firmly and fairly by teachers. The Christian ethic of doing unto others only what you would have them do to you, underpins relationships across the school. Consequently, adults care for pupils well; pupils respect adults and also treat each other kindly. Year 6 pupils were adamant that being racist is unacceptable and that calling each other names is unkind and should not happen.

Leaders have rightly created, therefore, a school based on mutual trust. This helps to keep all members of the community safe. Leaders also provide good-quality teaching on issues to do with safety and safeguarding. They promote healthy lifestyles and work with the kitchen staff to provide meals with good nutritional values.

Inspection findings

- This inspection was conducted to judge whether or not the school remains good and that safeguarding is effective. It was also conducted to explore whether the downturn in published key stage 2 results in 2017 was a blip and not a trend.
- Leaders are honest and frank in their assessment of the causes of the less good results in 2017, as yet unpublished. They describe the outcomes as disappointing. They gave a passionate account of their considerable work to understand what had happened. Their analysis is cogent and justified with suitable evidence.
- Leaders also presented a series of coherent strategies adopted since the summer of 2017 to ensure that those outcomes are not repeated. Among these are: a renewed focus on improving pupils' attendance, especially for those who are disadvantaged; regular testing, in timed conditions, of pupils' developing knowledge, skills and understanding; and further work to build pupils' resilience.
- Leaders are rightly explaining to parents, in all year groups, the benefits to learning of full attendance. They are using a full range of strategies to challenge parents to not take their children on holiday in term time. Governors fully support these strategies.
- Leaders demonstrated the detailed work they do to make sure that all assessment activity is accurate. They talked through the ways in which they compare teachers' judgements of pupils' work with teachers in other schools locally. You are a leading partner in the M7V cluster of schools and are able to show how this group of schools operates collaboratively to strengthen teachers' practice. Minster teachers have benefited from small cluster training on aspects of mathematics, improvements to the foundation stage and support for the development of pupils' writing.
- You showed me convincing evidence that a minority of pupils were only small margins away from better outcomes in either reading or mathematics. You also showed me the considerable impact of these near misses on the overall picture of attainment.
- The quality of written work, including emerging writing in the early years, indicates that the vast majority of pupils are working at age-expected levels. Fewer pupils, though, go on to work at the highest levels in reading and

mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils are often a little behind their peers. This is the case in the early years and is repeated in the Year 1 phonics check. The differences between them and their peers do not grow any bigger across key stage 2. However, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils is generally not as good as that of other pupils nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the performance of disadvantaged pupils, including their attendance, is closely monitored, and improves, to match that of other pupils in the school
- rates of progress for all pupils, especially the most able, are as high as they can be so that more attain high standardised scores or work at greater depth in reading and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

You led me on an extended learning walk of the school after a short tour at the start of the inspection. This was conducted jointly with the deputy headteacher. I met with a group of six Year 6 pupils and listened to four Year 4 pupils reading. I took into account 91 responses to Ofsted's confidential online pupil survey. I also considered 30 responses to the staff survey. I met with eight parents informally at the school gate and considered 63 responses to Ofsted's confidential online survey, Parent View. I read 45 free-text responses to this survey and the transcript of a phone call received in Ofsted's call centre during the inspection. I met with representatives of the governing body and conducted a phone call with the school's improvement partner from the local authority. I examined many of the school's documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for the future.