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Mrs Sophie Sear
Head of School
Cudham Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Sear

Short inspection of Cudham Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2009.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have worked with great determination to bring stability to the school so that pupils' learning can thrive. You were hampered in this until January 2017 by not having a team of permanent teaching staff. In spite of this, you have focused relentlessly on promoting high-quality teaching and improved outcomes, while providing a safe and secure environment for all pupils.

You now have a stronger teaching team. Your teaching skills act as a model for the rest of the teaching staff. You continually show teachers how to question pupils and not leave them without next steps once they have finished a sequence of work.

You have ensured that the school is aspirational, focused on achievement for all and is a place where pupils are involved in their learning. You have also sharpened procedures to monitor the quality of teaching. This enables you to identify clear targets for action and to work with teachers to develop the skills needed to teach mixed-age and mixed-phase classes.

The experience and expertise of the executive headteacher has helped in the work to make the school sustainable, given its small size and previous high staff turnover. She has shown how to focus on the key issues that this school needs to address to bring about improvement.

The trust board maintains a very close oversight of the school's performance through its scrutiny group. Members of the education scrutiny committee are forensic in checking and analysing the school's assessment data, while enabling ownership and accountability to rest with you. This helps you and the board to identify priorities for action and establish how targets can be met. The trust has provided very valuable support in your drive to improve teaching through its access to specialist staff in other trust schools, including in mathematics and early years. School reviews by the trust have helped to check progress made towards improvement targets. They have also identified some further areas to be tackled arising from the recent changes to class organisation.

You and your staff do much to promote values such as tolerance and respect for others. For example, 'Friendship Week' was all about tolerance, under the motto 'All equal, all different'. The school has run an International Day to broaden the pupils' perspectives and understanding of others.

Pupils' outcomes and attendance have varied in recent years, in part reflecting differences between the small cohorts year on year. Pupils in Year 6 in 2017 made very strong progress in writing and the proportion attaining the expected standard was well above average. The proportion attaining the expected standard in reading was average, but was below average in mathematics. Attainment at the high standard was below average in reading, writing and mathematics and hence is a target for school improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You make sure that the care and welfare of the pupils is a central priority for staff. Training ensures that all staff are kept aware of current safeguarding guidance. Staff are proactive in raising concerns. They understand how to recognise that pupils are at risk of harm and how to follow procedures.

The senior team has made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You meticulously record any concerns, and analysis of the information enables you to identify any patterns. You speedily refer cases to social services and work closely together with them to support families. Your checks make sure that you can account for pupils when they move to another school, so they do not go missing.

You and your staff train pupils in a variety of ways to spot and deal with risks. You also provide parents with guidance on how to keep their children safe.

Inspection findings

- You have rightly identified the need to improve pupils' progress in mathematics and we agreed that this should be a key focus for the inspection. Pupils' progress improved slightly at key stage 2 in 2017. Even so, the proportions of pupils attaining the expected and higher standard were well below the national average.

- Pupils generally calculate accurately but are not confident in transferring these basic skills to solving problems. There remains a legacy of gaps in skills and understanding among upper key stage 2 pupils that teachers are now starting to eliminate.
- Your own coaching of teachers, along with support from a trust specialist, is having an impact on the quality of mathematics teaching. Teachers generally meet the learning needs of pupils in mixed-age classes. They are starting to provide activities that enable pupils to explore topics in greater depth and so gain mastery of new skills and concepts. The training of support staff so that they can lead small-group sessions is also proving effective.
- You recognise that more still needs to be done. Mathematics teaching is not yet consistently good across the school. On occasion, teaching does not promote deeper understanding or push the most able pupils to explore in greater depth; and some work repeats a skill already mastered rather than moving quickly on to more demanding work.
- We also decided to focus on improvements that the school is making to the teaching of reading. You have identified that progress has not been rapid enough and that more pupils should attain the higher standard.
- Pupils develop secure basic reading skills. They make strong progress in phonics from the start of Reception; skilled teaching helps children to understand new letter sounds and use them to read unfamiliar words. Attainment has been consistently above average by the end of Year 1. Almost all those pupils who have not reached the expected standard then catch up by the end of Year 2.
- In key stage 2 pupils show that they are developing a love for literature. Teachers make sure that pupils have access to high-quality texts and that they choose books that will encourage them to read more. While these actions are leading to improvements in pupils' progress, we identified some remaining inconsistencies. In particular these relate to some teaching that fails to develop skills such as inference and deduction, and teachers' questions that do not probe understanding and push learning further for the most able.
- Third, we explored how well the school's new curriculum supports deep learning of all subjects. As well as promoting mathematics and reading, you have given particular emphasis to improving pupils' writing. This is stimulated by studying interesting texts and using these to teach key skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling. For example, Year 6 pupils used their study of Beowulf and the monster Grendel to see how an author structures text; this stimulated pupils' ideas for writing.
- Teachers have adopted a new topic-based approach to the curriculum. Each topic includes a 'buzz day' to stimulate interest and develop key subject skills. As yet, however, subjects other than English and mathematics are not taught in sufficient depth to enable the progressive development of knowledge, understanding and skills, particularly in the humanities and creative subjects.
- The curriculum is extended by a range of other activities. For example, in science, an astronomer visited Years 3 and 4 to build a 'planetarium' and help pupils design a 'moon buggy'. Most-able students had the opportunity to work

alongside their peers from other trust schools replicating the studies of Charles Darwin.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subjects including science, the humanities and creative arts are taught consistently and in depth so that the pupils develop knowledge, understanding and skills progressively as they move through the school
- training is accelerated for teachers so that they can teach reading, writing and mathematics to the higher standard; and to sharpen their questioning skills.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the Aquinas Church of England Education Trust, the director of education for the diocese of Rochester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bromley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- I met you and the executive headteacher, as well as other members of staff with leadership responsibilities. I met various representatives of Aquinas Trust, including the chief executive officer.
- You accompanied me when I visited parts of lessons. I also observed pupils as they moved around the school.
- I met with a group of pupils to discuss their experiences of school.
- I took account of the 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also took account of the 11 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were seven responses to the pupil survey.
- I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe and records of training and safeguarding checks.