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Mr Timothy Woodford
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Rownhams St John's Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Woodford

Short inspection of Rownhams St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

After the last inspection, the school underwent some considerable turbulence in staffing and leadership, and standards dipped. In 2014, governors appointed a new headteacher who made sure that pupils' outcomes rose substantially. Her work to build a highly positive and caring ethos is evident throughout the school. Since your appointment in September 2017, on the retirement of the previous headteacher, you have continued to ensure that pupils receive a good and improving quality of education.

Pupils exemplify the school motto of 'loving life; loving learning'. Positive, happy relationships between pupils and staff, and between the pupils themselves, ensure that classrooms are purposeful, productive places. Pupils say that they like the sense of achievement they get when work is challenging, and appreciate the support provided by adults when they need it, for example the timely advice they receive on how to edit and improve their work. Pupils readily take responsibility for their own learning, for example choosing to use dictionaries to help them edit and improve their writing. Pupils feel listened to, and especially value the opportunities you provide for them to show leadership. The 'Young governors' initiative, where they take an active look at a specific aspect of the school and feed back their findings to the school council, was particularly praised, as too were the weekly

'headteacher tea parties' set up to celebrate pupils' achievements.

Most noticeably, there is a strong sense of equality which permeates the school. In the early years, children do not readily conform to gender stereotypes, with both boys and girls actively enjoying construction activities and dressing up. The 'school poem' reflects that everyone is special in their different ways. Pupils are very accepting of each other's differences, with one telling me: 'It's not about what you are, it's about who you are and what's in your heart.' Pupils were keen to tell me that phrases such as, 'If you see someone without a smile, give them one of yours,' play a key part in ensuring that Rownhams St John's is a friendly, happy school.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They especially praise the welcoming, nurturing atmosphere and the positive communication between school and home. During my inspection, this was exemplified by the well-attended coffee morning, where parents enjoyed hearing the school choir perform, and heard about your priorities for the school in the coming year. Parents are confident that their children are happy and learning. As one said: 'I think the school's brilliant. Nothing is too much trouble – staff go above and beyond my expectations.'

Over time, leaders and governors have maintained an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for further improvement in the school. Governors keep themselves well informed through regular visits and by closely scrutinising leaders' work. Leaders and governors work effectively together to ensure that pupils achieve highly and that areas identified as needing improvement get better. For example, at the last inspection, the school was asked to improve the quality of provision in the early years. Leaders have achieved this, including by utilising useful support from the local authority. Inspectors also asked the school to further improve teaching so that most-able pupils are challenged and that pupils know what to do to improve their work. As a result of the hard work of your staff, and in particular your able deputy headteachers, this too has largely been achieved.

Pupils make very strong progress to achieve highly throughout the school. In 2016, above-average proportions achieved the combined reading, writing and mathematics score at the end of key stage 2. In 2017, this improved substantially, so that the proportion of pupils achieving the combined score was well above the national average, with several pupils exceeding the standard. Disadvantaged pupils make similarly strong progress, in 2017 achieving standards well above others nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. At the end of key stage 1, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, also make strong progress, consistently achieving standards above others nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in the early years and in Year 1 phonics are consistently above average.

The pride that you and your staff take in the school is evident. Throughout the school, wonderful displays of pupils' work, closely linked to the exciting topics pupils study, exemplify your staff's dedication in making sure that pupils enjoy and achieve during their time at Rownhams St John's. However, you and your staff are not complacent. You recognise where further refinements are necessary and act quickly to rectify any potential issues. Recently, you noticed a slight dip in some pupils'

attendance. Leaders' prompt and effective action, including through working with families and outside agencies, has ensured that these pupils are back on track and attending regularly. Your work to ensure that the exciting and well-planned curriculum enables pupils in all year groups to develop strong problem-solving and reasoning skills is well under way. So, too, are your plans to strengthen the leadership skills of new middle leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and governors have made sure that staff are well trained in child protection and safeguarding procedures. They know how to recognise the signs which may indicate neglect or abuse, and are confident that any concerns they raise will be taken seriously by leaders. Leaders diligently record all concerns, and utilise outside agencies well to ensure that any pupil who needs additional support receives it promptly. Recruitment checks on the suitability of staff working in the school are thorough.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school. They are very clear that there is always an adult to talk to should they have any worries. The curriculum helps to keep pupils safe. E-safety is a key priority, with pupils understanding the importance of reporting any concerns they may have to an adult. Junior road safety officers help younger pupils learn how to use the roads and pathways safely.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked effectively to improve the quality of provision in the early years so that it is now a strength of the school. Adults make sure that children take responsibility for their own learning. Well-planned activities allow children to choose to pursue their learning along routes which interest and challenge them. Adults skilfully interact with children to help develop strong communication and language skills. For example, as children play, adults talk with children about what they are doing, asking questions which help children to explain their thinking. The recently renovated outside area is full of stimulating activities through which children can learn and develop their skills. For example, during my visit children designed and built for themselves an obstacle course as part of a construction task. They then carefully practised balancing, under an adult's watchful eye. Adults track each child's development well across all areas of the curriculum. They provide timely extra support for any child who needs additional help in a particular area. As a result, above-average proportions of children achieve a good level of development at the end of the early years, and children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Senior leaders have overseen improvements in the quality of teaching so that it is consistently strong throughout the school. Leaders quickly identify any areas which might need refining, and act promptly to address them. Teachers and teaching assistants feel well supported through regular, quality training and monitoring. They value the help they receive which allows them to constantly reflect on and further improve their practice. You have, rightly, identified the need to develop new middle leaders' skills so that they are able to hold teachers

to account for the quality of their work.

- You noticed that last year, some of the most able pupils in key stage 1 were not challenged to achieve highly enough. You have addressed this swiftly, ensuring that staff are acutely aware of each pupil's targets and what pupils need to do to reach the higher levels of attainment by the end of Year 2. For example, in English, pupils are encouraged to make links, connections and inferences between the different books they are reading. Consequently, most-able pupils in key stage 1 are on track to achieve the high standards of which they are capable.
- You are currently focused on making sure that pupils are challenging themselves sufficiently in mathematics, particularly when solving problems and using their reasoning skills. Teachers have researched different approaches, choosing those that will make the most difference for pupils in your school. For example, I saw pupils of all ages using mathematical apparatus independently to aid their thinking about mathematical problems. Adults consistently encourage pupils to explain their thinking by asking 'Why?', 'What do you know?' and 'How do you know?' Pupils consider these questions carefully, so deepening their understanding of mathematics. This is working well. Last year, pupils' progress by the end of Year 6 was well above the national average, so that above-average proportions achieved the expected and high standard in mathematics. Most-able disadvantaged pupils achieved especially highly. Progress for current pupils throughout the school is similarly strong.
- The curriculum has been very well designed to enable pupils to develop secure knowledge and understanding across the whole curriculum. Leaders' intention that learning should be 'irresistible' is backed up by pupils. They told me that they love learning about the topics they study, especially when they are writing for a particular purpose. In Years 5 and 6, the Harry Potter project is inspiring pupils to write imaginatively and at length, using accurate grammatical structures. Pupils in Year 2 proudly showed me their detailed booklets about wolves. Similarly, pupils' work in their reading journals is of high quality, demonstrating the pride they take in their work. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 enthused about the challenging class text 'Boy Overboard', which taught them about the plight of modern-day refugees. You recognise that the next stage is for middle leaders to oversee the further development of the curriculum, by ensuring that subject-specific skills are more embedded throughout, and that pupils' progress is tracked across the broader curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders' skills are strengthened so that they are able to hold teachers to account for the quality of their work and track pupils' progress across the whole curriculum
- teaching consistently challenges pupils from their starting points by ensuring that subject-specific skills are embedded across the whole curriculum, particularly problem-solving and reasoning in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I observed learning throughout the school with senior leaders. I met with you and your senior team throughout the inspection to discuss your self-evaluation of the school. I met with a group of leaders to examine pupils' work. I scrutinised a number of school records relating to school improvement, monitoring, child protection and governance. I met with teachers and governors and spoke on the telephone to a representative of the local authority. I spoke to pupils in class and met more formally with two groups of pupils. I took account of the 25 responses to the staff survey and 83 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, from parents, along with the 71 free-text responses.