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Mrs Carol Gardiner  
Headteacher  
St Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School  
Friars Road  
Winchelsea  
East Sussex  
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Dear Mrs Gardiner

### **Short inspection of St Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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 October 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as substantive headteacher, you have wasted no time in introducing new ideas which are improving classroom practice, as well as having a positive impact on the ethos of the school. Parents and carers, staff and governors approve of the changes you have made and sense an upward trajectory in all aspects of the school. Parents are especially pleased with the much improved communication from school leaders. They told me they feel more involved in the school and think your open approach has changed the culture for the better. Staff were also positive about the developments in the school. Middle leaders, in particular, are more active in the day-to-day leadership of the school and are beginning to have an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are positive about the flexibility they now have to plan learning across the curriculum. They also appreciate the increasing responsibility they are being given to develop different aspects of the school's work, including improving parental engagement.

Pupils were happy to tell me about their work. They told me they enjoy coming to school because lessons are interesting and because teachers know and understand them as individuals. Classroom visits gave me an impression of a happy school, where pupils are keen to learn. The mixed Reception and Year 1 class was certainly a hive of excited activity with children enacting the fairy tale 'The Princess and the Pea'. Routines were well established inside and outside the classroom. Concentration levels were high as pupils discussed and wrote their follow-up questions for the princess.

Pupils were equally engaged in their learning further up the school. It was clear to see that your drive to improve pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics is beginning to have an impact. Pupils' books showed me that work is generally pitched at the right level. Where engagement in learning was strong, pupils were very clear about what they were learning and why. Where it was less so, pupils were unclear about what the main focus of their learning was.

At the time of the last inspection, the inspector acknowledged the many strengths of the school. These included effective teaching leading to good progress, pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning, and the safe and nurturing environment of the school. The inspector also recognised that good classroom practice could be shared more widely within the school, and that pupils' attendance needed to be better. These aspects have been addressed successfully. It is clear that staff are a collegiate team who are working increasingly closely to share effective practice and make improvements where things need to be better. The rate of pupils' absence has declined, particularly persistent absence. Attendance now matches that seen in other schools nationally.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation. You were able to explain the school's many strengths, as well as the key priorities for development. You acknowledged the need to improve the progress pupils make in reading and mathematics as they move through key stage 2. You also recognise the need to increase the proportion of pupils achieving more highly in English and mathematics across all year groups.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Policies, procedures and day-to-day routines are sound. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to protect pupils. Their training is up to date. Staff know what to do and who to talk to if they have concerns. Importantly, the culture to safeguard pupils is strong.

All parents who talked to me or completed Ofsted's online survey expressed the opinion that their children feel safe in school. One parent explained to me how the school's strong pastoral care has impacted positively on her child, and the family's life outside school. Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. They talked knowledgeably about staying safe online and said that bullying is not really a problem for them.

### **Inspection findings**

- The school's curriculum is a strength and meets the needs of pupils well. Pupils enjoy the topics they study. They enjoy the practical aspects of their science work. They look forward to the creative aspects of the curriculum, including filming stop-motion animations linked to their history work. Staff enjoy the freedom they have to plan learning which stimulates pupils' wider interests, within the framework of the school's curriculum overview. Learning outside the classroom is given high importance. Visits to the local and wider community are

the norm, including to the 'beach school', which includes bird watching and is led by a qualified teacher.

- Pupils' social and emotional development is served well by the wider curriculum and the many enrichment activities available. The school maintains and fully utilises its own swimming pool. Pupils sing with enthusiasm and many take advantage of a wide range of sports and activity clubs available to them during and after school.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do well at the school. However, the very small number of these pupils in some cohorts means that comparing their outcomes with those of other pupils is not meaningful. Classroom visits showed that teachers are particularly aware of the need to ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are challenged and inspired to achieve well. Pastoral support is also strong. As a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved significantly recently.
- School leaders and governors realise that the proportion of pupils who achieve a greater depth of learning in English and mathematics across the school needs to be higher. Because the school is small, variations in cohorts can be significant and year-on-year comparisons to national averages are not wise. However, it is clear that levels of challenge for most-able pupils need to be a constant focus, so that all pupils make good or better progress and achieve to the best of their ability.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have made more rapid progress in reading and mathematics by the time they leave key stage 2
- a greater proportion of pupils achieve at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I visited classrooms, assessing the progress pupils were making and talking to them about their learning. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, at breaktime and as they moved around the school. I attended an

assembly. I met with the headteacher, the chair of the governing body accompanied by two other governors, a group of teachers, non-teaching support staff, and also with a group of pupils. I talked with parents throughout the school day and took into account 21 replies to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and accompanying free-text messages. I also talked to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including safeguarding records, pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of governing body meetings and notes of visits from the diocese and local authority.