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Mrs Tracey Hailey
Executive Headteacher
Plymtree Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hailey

Short inspection of Plymtree Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 June 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. You lead and support your enthusiastic team with a clear sense of purpose to provide a safe and happy learning environment for all pupils. Pupils' welfare is at the centre of all decisions and you make sure that pupils engage in a wide range of learning opportunities. Pupils described how you encourage them to adopt healthy lifestyles by providing them with regular physical activities and the chance to take part in numerous competitive sporting events. All of the staff members who responded to the staff questionnaire said that they are proud to work at the school. They told me that you care for their well-being and they feel respected by you, the school governors and the local community.

You have led the school effectively through a time of staff changes while the head of school is recovering from long-term illness. The federation's school improvement leader, who has regularly stepped in to lead the school on a day-to-day basis, has given you excellent support through this challenging time. Together, you have ensured the smooth running of the school and the continued focus on raising standards as described in your plans for improvement.

School governors provide the right balance of support and challenge to school leaders. They have a good understanding of the performance of different groups of pupils and are aware of school strengths and areas for improvement.

The school listens to and works closely with parents and carers. Parents who spoke with me during the inspection, and those who responded online, were all extremely positive about the broad range of activities provided by the school. One parent

stated, 'The school offers a huge array of extra-curricular activity.' Another parent described how her child is supported to be her own person and encouraged to try 'all sorts of activities'. Parents also described the school's 'personal caring touch' and 'an intense focus on learning'.

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early years and to ensure that teachers moved pupils on more quickly once they mastered what they were learning. These aspects formed the focus for this inspection and are described in the next section of this letter. You were also asked to check that pupils understand how to improve their work in light of the feedback given to them by their teachers and to keep parents better informed about their children's progress.

Since the previous inspection, school leaders have encouraged pupils of all abilities to become more responsible for monitoring their own academic progress. Pupils described, in detail, how their teachers take time to work with them individually, or in small groups, to tackle any misconceptions. During the inspection, all pupils in a mixed-age class worked enthusiastically through a series of progressively difficult mathematics challenges. One pupil told me that she had struggled at the start of the lesson to understand the algebraic 'nth term'. The teacher had noticed her puzzled look and gave her individual support. The pupil asserted, 'Now, it is crystal clear!'

Parents are pleased with the information that they receive about their children's progress and the useful links on the school website to sites and resources that support learning at home.

Leaders have identified the need to ensure that a higher proportion of pupils achieve the higher standards in mathematics in key stage 2. Current pupils are expected to tackle increasingly challenging tasks in the subject in all classes. Leaders are determined that this heightened challenge will lead to stronger pupil outcomes. Leaders are also aware of the need to ensure that no pupils are disadvantaged due to persistent absence.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training records are up to date and appropriate checks are made of staff before they start employment. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding helps to ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are safe and that leaders act quickly to address any concerns.

Pupils know how to stay safe in school, in the community and when online. They said that bullying is extremely rare and this was further verified by the positive pupil and parent responses to the online questionnaires. Pupils described the effective training given by teachers to help them remain safe when using social media or computer games. All parents who spoke with me during the inspection said that their children are happy and safe at your school.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry considered how effectively leaders are ensuring that teachers challenge pupils to achieve the higher standards in mathematics. In 2017, the percentage of pupils in key stage 2 achieving the expected standard was above the national average. However, the percentage reaching the higher standard was below average because pupils with prior higher attainment did not make sufficient progress.
- During our visits to both classes of key stage 2 pupils, we looked for examples of pupils being challenged to reach the higher standards in mathematics. I talked with pupils from every year group and asked them to show me the progress that they are making over time as demonstrated in their workbooks.
- I found clear evidence to show that teachers, in both classes, are using a range of suitable resources to inspire and challenge pupils. Pupils told me that they are encouraged to select increasingly difficult tasks as they master each mathematical concept. Pupils in all year groups could show me examples where their teachers have used effective strategies to move them forward in their understanding. Scrutiny of pupils' workbooks confirms the school's assessment that a higher percentage of the current Year 6 pupils are working at the higher standard in the subject than in previous years. Leaders acknowledge that it is important for the newly introduced strategies to become embedded so that this improved performance at the higher standard continues.
- The next line of enquiry assessed the progress being made by children in the early years. The previous inspection judged that children entered the school with skills and understanding appropriate for their age. By the end of the Reception Year, a smaller percentage of children achieved a good level of development than was seen nationally. The proportion of children reaching this level improved in 2016 but fell below average in 2017.
- Leaders and staff have risen to the challenge of improving outcomes in the early years. The early years teacher is providing exciting learning activities for children in the indoor and outdoor spaces. Children are given opportunities to use their creativity and imagination in a purposeful way. For example, children using the 'mud kitchen' were using a wide range of equipment to create a feast.
- The progress made by children in their first year is closely monitored, and current information shows that a higher percentage of children are working at a good level of development than in previous years. A skilful teaching assistant, who knows the children well, ably supports the teacher. She explained how she had encouraged the Reception children to write their favourite facts after reading a non-fiction book about how plants grow. One child had written, 'The pumpkin's huge roots collect water from the soil.'
- The third line of enquiry assessed how effective leaders are in ensuring that teachers move pupils on to harder work more quickly than at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders have provided effective training for teachers to improve in this aspect and have checked improvements through regular observations of the quality of teaching that have included looking at progress in pupils' workbooks. There is clear evidence to show that all teachers are moving

pupils on to greater challenges and pupils told me how they appreciated being asked for their opinion on how well they are progressing. One said, 'Giving your own opinion is part of fundamental human rights.'

- The final line of enquiry investigated what action leaders have taken to improve the attendance of pupils. Overall rates of absence at the school have been lower than the national average over time. However, in 2016, the rate of persistent absence for some groups of pupils rose to levels well above the national average. Leaders know the pupils well and can identify why the 2016 absence figures were high. They have introduced a range of strategies to improve attendance and these are leading to improved attendance figures for the current year. While the attendance rate for all pupils is improving, there are still a number of pupils who are persistently absent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- current effective initiatives become embedded so that more pupils achieve higher standards in mathematics at key stage 2
- rates of persistent absence for all pupils continue to reduce so that pupils' attendance is in line with, or above, national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Hodson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the school improvement leader, the mathematics leader, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the chair of the governing body and the safeguarding governor. I discussed the school's performance with the local authority consultant during a telephone call. The school improvement leader and I visited all classrooms to assess the progress being made by pupils. I looked at pupils' workbooks and talked with pupils in classes and at a separate meeting. We considered the school's information on the progress being made by current pupils.

We looked at a range of documentary evidence. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance. I looked at various documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record. We assessed current rates of attendance for groups of pupils and I gathered parents' views from 19 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed several free-text responses from parents and

the results of the staff and pupil questionnaires.