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Mrs Julia Bray
Head of School
Northiam Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bray

Short inspection of Northiam Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 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 September 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the last inspection, the school has gone through a period of significant change in leadership and teaching staff. Short-term solutions involving a succession of interim leaders and a high turnover of teaching staff resulted in a decline in standards. Since your appointment in April 2016 and the appointment of two executive headteachers in April 2017, determined and effective leadership led to many improvements. You have sensibly targeted the most urgent priorities. As a result, there have been rapid improvements in standards, as evidenced by pupils' test results when compared against national benchmarks at the end of Reception and Years 2 and 6. The school is recognised by the local authority as being in a more stable position and now well placed to build on recent improvements.

Your dedicated leadership inspires trust and confidence in the whole school community. Parents speak warmly of how approachable leaders and teachers are and how happy their children are at school, despite their concerns about the frequent changes in teaching staff. The school population has grown substantially, and more children arrive and leave the school during the year than in other schools nationally. You have managed these changes well and established a nurturing and inclusive school. Parents were keen to tell me how quickly their children had settled and how well the school was meeting their individual needs. 'The tenacious efforts

of the head of school [have] created a sense of inclusion and encouraged my child's underlying joy and love of learning' is one representative comment from parents. Pupils told me 'anyone is welcome at this school' and explained how all ages work and play together well.

Governors are very committed to the school and bring a range of skills and different backgrounds to their roles. They visit regularly to check for themselves what leaders tell them. As a result, they have a clear insight into the school's strengths and areas for development and can hold leaders to account for continuous school improvement.

Leaders have focused on preparing pupils well for their secondary education. In 2017, a much higher proportion of key stage 2 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, reached the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics than other pupils nationally. Some areas for improvement identified when the school was last inspected have been addressed successfully. For example, in Reception children now have access to equipment, and space to climb, explore and enjoy purposeful learning in a well-resourced outside area.

However, frequent changes in leadership have hindered the development of a curriculum which enables pupils to use and apply their skills across a range of subjects. You are now rightly concentrating on implementing a well-planned curriculum to address this. You also recognise the need to improve pupils' rates of attendance and ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good and teachers' expectations are high across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe and are confident that if they are worried about anything there is always an adult to whom they can turn for support. Leaders and teachers know their families well and the attentiveness given to keeping vulnerable pupils from harm is a strength of the school.

All necessary checks on the suitability of staff, volunteers, contractors and governors are carried out and recorded appropriately. Well-documented accounts show close inter-agency working to protect pupils from harm and to improve outcomes for vulnerable pupils.

The school works hard to ensure that pupils attend regularly. Absence is taken very seriously and always investigated to check it is not related to safeguarding. While there are examples of the school's efforts making a real difference to an increasing number of pupils, attendance overall is still too low and rates of persistent absence are too high.

Inspection findings

- Children make a very positive start to school in Reception. A drive to raise standards in phonics has been successful. Reception children confidently use

their phonics to write independently and read simple texts accurately. The proportion of pupils who attain the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check is now in line with national averages.

- A rising proportion of the most able pupils in upper key stage 2 are now working at the higher standards in mathematics and writing. Mathematics lessons are structured so that work can be accessed at different levels. Upper key stage 2 pupils' books reflect an appropriate level of challenge in mathematics and writing. However, this is not consistent in other parts of the school. In addition, expectations of how pupils present their work are not as high as they are in Years 5 and 6.
- The quality of teaching across the school is improving but is still variable. Where teaching is strongest, for example in Years 5 and 6, pupils of all abilities are challenged, highly motivated, excited about their learning and achieve well.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and Year 6 pupils spoke particularly enthusiastically about their '30 things wild' topic. In this topic pupils study an aspect of the natural world for 30 minutes every day, for example through webcams or bug hunts. However, pupils' books in some other year groups show that pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to apply and develop their skills across a range of subjects. Leaders plan to address this through their revised and well-planned curriculum, to be implemented from the autumn term.
- Leaders use additional funding effectively to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The majority of disadvantaged pupils make better-than-expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics across key stage 2. As a result, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is steadily closing.
- The support given to vulnerable pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is a strength of the school. The special educational needs coordinator has been very effective in training staff to meet the needs of low-attaining pupils. Close links with outside agencies have been established to support pupils with complex needs and to provide specialist resources where necessary. The school's speech and language therapist and counsellor are having a positive effect on pupils' communication and their social and emotional well-being. As a result, all pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make accelerated progress in reading, writing and mathematics in lower key stage 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on their work to reduce levels of persistent and overall absence, so that rates fall to be in line with national levels
- they implement fully their revised curriculum plans and ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to use and apply their skills across a wide range of subjects

- teaching is consistently good throughout the school and all teachers have equally high expectations, including of the standard of presentation of pupils' work.

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

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and the two executive headteachers. I met with members of the governing body and held a telephone call with a representative of the local authority. I visited all classes with you and one of the executive headteachers. I observed behaviour in lessons and on the playground. I also met with a group of pupils from across the school to discuss their learning. I scrutinised the school's records of progress and attainment data for all pupils with you and the executive headteachers. We also analysed pupils' progress in their books and during visits to classrooms. I met with the bursar to check the school's records of the suitability of staff, volunteers, governors and supply teachers to work with children. The views of the 11 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, together with 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.