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Mrs Samantha Crook
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Dear Mrs Crook

Short inspection of Rackenford Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school has experienced turbulence in its leadership over the past two years, resulting in a decline in standards and falling numbers. Since you began supporting the school in October 2017, and since the secondment to the school of the acting head of school in January 2018, you have secured significant improvements. You have worked closely together to create a school culture with a strong sense of high expectations and purpose. Staff, governors, parents and carers have confidence in the school's leadership.

You have an accurate and realistic view of the school's current performance. Your development plans are sharp and precise, with clear and measurable targets to secure improvement. You have taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, the teaching of mathematics is now better meeting the needs of pupils and they are making good progress as a result.

Governors know their school well and are highly supportive, giving their time to make regular, focused visits. They understand the key strengths and areas for improvement and ensure that their visits monitor progress against the school's key priorities. Governors are rigorous in holding senior leaders to account.

Since your appointment, you have introduced effective teacher appraisal arrangements which allow you to hold teachers accountable for targets linked to school improvement priorities. These are closely tied to professional development

activities and support teachers to improve their practice. Target setting and pupil progress meetings have helped to raise expectations about what pupils are capable of achieving. Assessment information is used effectively to track individual pupils' progress and help teachers to know when pupils' progress needs to be improved. However, teachers are not yet using this information to develop pupils' reading skills of inference, deduction and comprehension effectively.

Parents are extremely supportive of the school; 95% of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school, along with all of those who spoke to me during the inspection. They value the care, guidance and support that their children receive. One parent whose child recently joined the school stated that their child had 'been transformed' into one who loved school. They believed that this is due to the adults in school helping their child to feel special.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, the governors and the federation have created a very strong culture for safeguarding. Records and systems for keeping pupils safe are rigorous, including the employment checks on the suitability of adults to work in school. You ensure that all adults, including governors, receive regular, up-to-date training on safeguarding, including issues pertaining to the local area, such as county lines and child sexual exploitation. All staff know what to do if they have a concern about a child. Your records show that concerns are referred promptly and fully and that you take appropriate follow-up actions to ensure that all pupils are safe.

Pupils say that they feel safe. The 'trusting hands' approach means that all pupils can identify five adults that they trust to be able to talk to should they have problems. Pupils know about different situations which might be dangerous and they know what to do to stay safe, for example online or during a fire.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry focused on the culture of safeguarding, including pupils' attendance, at the school. This is a highly inclusive school and parents recognise the lengths you go to in order to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for all pupils, regardless of any additional special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. You have been relentless in your drive to reduce the level of absence for some pupils, with some notable success. You work with other agencies to help parents and pupils understand the importance of good school attendance. However, the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities remains too low.
- Governors attend workshops to develop their knowledge of safeguarding issues. These include radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and peer-on-peer abuse. Senior leaders and governors have had safer recruitment training to ensure the suitability of all employees at the school. Weekly staff briefings include safeguarding scenarios and help to keep staff members' knowledge

and understanding current. There is an 'it could happen here' culture of vigilance.

- My second key line of enquiry evaluated how well the teaching of reading was building on pupils' early phonics and decoding skills. Leaders identified that some groups and individuals did not make the progress of which they were capable during the last year. There has been effective work in ensuring that there are now a range of high-quality reading materials for children to enjoy in school, including tractor magazines, which were requested by some of the boys. The new curriculum links high-quality texts to other areas of learning, which is engaging pupils in reading.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about reading and an increased proportion are practising their skills at home in response to the weekly 'reading raffle' where they can win a prize for reading regularly at home. Pupils' ability to read aloud with fluency is in line with expected standards for their age. However, they do not have the skills of inference, deduction and comprehension in place to allow them to confidently interrogate and draw meaning from a text.
- My third line of enquiry focused on how well the teaching of writing builds on pupils' early phonics skills. The established non-negotiables around spelling, handwriting and punctuation practice are effective. You have taken action to ensure that teachers are teaching spelling rules and techniques effectively and that pupils are applying these, along with punctuation and grammar, in their writing in all subjects. This remains a focus for leaders. Recent professional development for teachers has ensured that the school's focus has resulted in pupils' improved handwriting and presentation.
- My final key line of enquiry was to evaluate the teaching of mathematics, particularly at key stage 2. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to move pupils' learning on quickly. The use of leaders' non-negotiables about the practice of multiplication tables and number facts means that pupils are building fluency in their mathematical knowledge. Pupils are given opportunities to use their reasoning skills in a range of contexts and are completing work at the expected standards for their age.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils develop the necessary inference, deduction and comprehension skills that they need when reading
- teachers continue to ensure that pupils use accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation in their writing.

I am copying this letter to the co-chairs 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

Rachel Miller
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We agreed the timetable and activities for the inspection. During the inspection I met with you, the head of school, the English and mathematics leaders and the leader for SEN and/or disabilities. I heard various pupils of different ages read. I scrutinised safeguarding records and we discussed a wide range of related matters and case studies. I evaluated evidence that shows how you work with other agencies. I also met with four governors and scrutinised minutes of their meetings and their reports. We examined a sample of pupils' work in their books over time, alongside their progress information. I examined a range of documents, including your self-evaluation, school improvement planning and monitoring documents. I met with a group of pupils of different ages. I considered the 19 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View, your own recent parent questionnaires and the 10 responses to the staff survey.