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Miss Alex Coulbault
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Coulbault

Short inspection of Ditton Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 6 November 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 your school was judged to be good in January 2015.

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.**

In the year that you have been at the school, you have accurately identified its strengths and weaknesses. You are committed to providing the best possible education for the pupils at Ditton Junior School. However, there are improvements that need to be made. You know that aspects of teaching, learning and assessment do not meet the needs of all pupils. This means that pupils do not make the progress they should, particularly in reading and mathematics.

You have established a robust system to monitor the quality of teaching. You provide good, timely support for staff in order for them to improve their practice still further. Staff spoken to during the inspection told me they appreciate the support they receive. Crucially, you have taken firm action to eradicate weak teaching. You have been hindered by difficulties in staffing, but, despite this, your actions are starting to show impact. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving.

Governors know the school well and share your vision. They value your leadership, which is driving improvements. Governors are not complacent and are keen to continue to improve their effectiveness. For example, they initiated a review of governance and have acted successfully to address the recommendations made.

Governors have provided good support to you in tackling weak teaching. They also provide increasingly effective challenge. For example, governors questioned you about how you will evaluate the impact of the new mathematics scheme.

Pupils I spoke with were polite, confident and friendly. They told me they enjoy playing with their friends and working together in lessons. Pupils were excited to tell me about the newly introduced 'pupil leadership team' and the growing opportunities they have to take responsibility in the school. Pupils' high levels of attendance reflect their enjoyment of the school.

You are keen to make sure that pupils have an adult in the school to talk to if they have concerns. Your commitment to this is demonstrated by your recruitment of a counsellor to work with pupils who need extra support for their emotional and social development. Pupils told me about the prayer and worry boxes that they can use to share any worries.

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the monitoring of the learning of disadvantaged pupils so that gaps in their achievement are reduced. You have established a rigorous system for checking pupils' progress so that additional support can be given to pupils who need it. However, although some disadvantaged pupils are now making good progress, others are not making the progress they need to, in order to catch up as they should.

School leaders were also asked to improve pupils' achievement in the broader curriculum. You, together with staff, have introduced a revised curriculum. Pupils say they enjoy the topics. They spoke positively about the 'daily workout' and told me it would make them healthier. However, there is more to be done to make sure that the new curriculum is embedded and enables pupils to develop appropriate skills and knowledge across a range of subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors rightly take safeguarding seriously. Together, you have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. For example, when you joined the school, you instigated a review of safeguarding by an external specialist. You lost no time in taking action on the areas for improvement identified.

Appropriate checks are made on new staff. You make sure that all staff are trained appropriately and know what they need to do if they have concerns. Governors carry out useful monitoring visits to check that safeguarding systems are used effectively. Most parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey agree that their child is safe in the school. Pupils know how to keep safe in several ways, including when using the internet.

You have worked successfully with the families of pupils with lower attendance. As a result, attendance rates, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, have improved.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on specific areas during this short inspection. The first of these was the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. You have made a good start in improving the progress they make. Governors have renewed their focus on checking how well disadvantaged pupils are learning. As a result, a greater proportion of disadvantaged pupils are working at the expected standard for their age than last year. However, although there are examples of individual pupils making good progress, the overall picture is too variable.
- The second area we agreed to review in detail was how well school leaders have responded to the 2018 national tests, especially in reading and mathematics. You were disappointed with the results and have taken swift action in response.
- You recognised the need to overhaul the way in which mathematics is taught and have introduced a new approach. The impact of this is beginning to be evident. Where teachers are using the new approach and resources to best effect, pupils make good progress. This is because mathematical ideas build progressively and are explained clearly. However, evidence gathered during the inspection shows that this is not consistent across the school.
- You have introduced a structured approach to the teaching of reading to improve pupils' achievement. This includes having a 'class read' which pupils told me that they enjoy. For example, Year 5 pupils were able to tell me about Stanley's experience at Camp Green Lake after reading 'Holes'. However, this new approach is in its very early days and is not embedded. In addition, pupils do not receive sufficient guidance in choosing appropriately challenging books to read. As a result, pupils do not make consistently good progress in reading.
- We also looked at how well the wider curriculum supports pupils' achievement. You have very recently introduced a revised curriculum which is designed to make links across different subjects and make learning more memorable. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 5 were excited to use their computing skills to design and make games. The links with other subjects were evident. For example, pupils composed the music for the game, and have plans to design and make the presentation box. The curriculum is now broad and balanced. However, too often, activities lack the level of challenge needed for pupils to make the progress they should across the wider curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue their drive to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
- the development of the curriculum continues so that it enables pupils to make good progress across a range of subjects
- the teaching of reading and mathematics is consistently strong so that all pupils make the progress they should.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanna Toulson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you to discuss the school's effectiveness. Together, we visited lessons to evaluate pupils' learning and to look at work in their books. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. I gathered views from parents in the playground at the beginning of the school day and considered the 53 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I also spoke to a group of staff and took account of the 15 responses to the online staff survey. I met with a group of pupils to talk about their work and to capture their views of school life and took account of the 64 responses to the online pupil survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including an evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school's single central record of staff recruitment checks, records of pupils' behaviour, attendance information and minutes of governing body meetings.