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Mrs Debbie Morrison
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Morrison

Short inspection of Stone Church of England Combined School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2019, 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2015.

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 headteacher in September 2015, you, the deputy and governors have been effective in developing a collegiate approach in the school where all work together to ensure the very best provision for pupils. You have rightly recognised that some pupils could make more progress. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils, and your work to tackle this is bringing improvements.

Leaders work hard to include parents and carers and the wider school community as part of the school's development. This approach is recognised and appreciated by parents, one of whom commented, 'The school has a wonderful community feel and I would definitely recommend it to other parents.'

Pupils are proud of their school. They work hard in lessons and enjoy their learning. You are creating a learning environment where pupils feel valued, are tolerant and have strong relationships with one another. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure, and treat one another with care and respect. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they are given to help younger pupils. Year 5 pupils were particularly proud of the regular opportunities they are given to read stories to pupils in Year 1 to help them develop a love of reading. Pupils develop useful skills, such as resourcefulness and resilience. This is evident in the positive way pupils respond to challenging tasks and activities, which they approach with confidence. This was illustrated by the work seen in books and the comments of pupils. For example, one older pupil commented, 'You have to

stick at things and try and find a way through, try lots of different ways to find the answer.'

In the previous inspection, inspectors highlighted the following strengths: the school was well led and managed; attainment at the end of Year 6 was above average; teaching was good; and governors know the school and local community well. These strengths have been maintained. Leaders were asked to improve teaching so that pupils could make better progress in mathematics. Pupils throughout the school are making more progress as a result of consistent teaching. Improving pupils' mental agility has been a key focus of the school. Careful planning is directed at developing pupils' confidence. Ensuring that pupils move on only when they fully understand concepts allows them to make consistent progress in their learning. There are now greater opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills in other areas of learning. Subject coordinators have identified areas where pupils can purposefully use their mathematical skills to help with learning in other subjects.

Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was above national figures in 2018. Progress figures for the last three years in reading, writing and mathematics have been average. The most recent assessment information, confirmed by the work seen in pupils' books, shows that some pupils are now making more than expected progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a very strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Pupils feel very safe because they trust the adults who look after them. 'There is always someone in school to turn to if you need to,' commented one younger pupil. Policies and procedures are clear, with unambiguous statements relating to roles and responsibilities ensuring that safeguarding is seen as everybody's responsibility.

Regular and consistent monitoring of records ensures that record keeping is robust and that appropriate actions are taken should any safeguarding or child protection issue arise. Vetting procedures for the employment of staff are transparent and detailed, ensuring that pupils are well protected from possible harm. The school works appropriately with outside agencies to make sure that pupils and families are suitably supported when they need help.

Pupils, parents and staff agree that Stone School is a safe place in which to learn and play. Comprehensive induction arrangements are in place to train new staff in safeguarding, and there is ongoing training for all staff annually. This training extends to the governing body, which has two safeguarding leads to complement the three designated leaders in school. As a result, staff say that they are confident to take the right action should any safeguarding issue arise.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed to review the progress that pupils were making in writing and mathematics, with a particular emphasis on the most

able pupils, how you have developed the curriculum, and what leaders have done to improve teaching in the school.

- My first line of enquiry looking at the progress pupils are making in writing and mathematics, focused on most-able pupils. This is because, while attainment in these subjects by the end of Year 6 is higher than average, the most able pupils were not making the progress of which they are capable.
- You provided convincing evidence through available assessment information, supported by the work in books across year groups, that progress in writing and mathematics is improving and that the most able pupils are making better progress.
- In mathematics, pupils are now applying their mathematical knowledge in a wider range of problem-solving and reasoning activities. In writing, teachers are focusing on developing pupils' understanding and use of vocabulary, and improving their sentence construction. Pupils have greater opportunities to edit and refine their work, with a focus in improving language and the complexity of sentence structure. As a result of leaders' work, progress in writing and mathematics is improving and more of the most able pupils are reaching their potential. This is a good start, but there is still more to do to embed these improvements across the school.
- The second line of enquiry was to consider the impact the curriculum is having on pupils' learning. Senior leaders, working with staff, have completely reviewed the curriculum in response to the needs of the pupils in the school. Working with pupils and parents, you have developed your 'skills for life' curriculum. These skills for life include 'taking on challenges' and 'learning from mistakes'. They are cleverly woven into themes to help the pupils develop the skills to acquire knowledge and understanding.
- Topics, and initiatives such as the school's 'wow days' and a recent 'Anglo Saxon visiting Year 4' exercise, capture pupils' imagination and celebrate their learning. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning, and the improving progress seen in English and mathematics is reflected in other subjects such as history, geography and science.
- My final line of enquiry focused on the actions leaders are taking to improve teaching in the school. This is because published data had not shown any significant improvements in pupils' progress over the last three years. Leaders have a structured approach to improving teaching in the school, focusing on teachers' self-assessment, followed by ongoing support and development. Senior leaders are effective in holding teachers to account, regularly monitoring teaching, and providing teachers with clear feedback and targets to improve their practice.
- Teachers appreciate the support and advice they are given, and they are proactive in improving their performance. Teachers are encouraged to learn from one another to enable pupils to gain the best outcomes. Recent improvements in pupils' progress illustrate that the actions you are taking are effective in improving pupils' learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strategies for challenging the most able pupils in mathematics and writing are embedded in all classes across the school
- pupils make the progress increases of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

William James
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy and several members of staff. We reviewed your management structure and the improvements that have been made since the previous inspection. I visited several lessons to observe learning, accompanied by a senior leader, and examined pupils' work. I held a meeting with representatives of the governing body, including the chair. I undertook telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and an adviser who knows the school well.

Prior to the inspection, I examined a variety of documents relating to the school. These included published performance information and the school's website. I considered a range of documentation, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance.

I took into account 55 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 17 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I also met with a group of pupils to discuss their learning and their views about the school.