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Mrs Pamela Scott
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Scott

Short inspection of Hildenborough Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 2017, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have provided effective leadership through a time of staffing instability since the last inspection. Since that time, all but one of the teachers have left the school and the leadership team, apart from yourself, has changed entirely. You work closely with your deputy headteacher to drive forward improvements. Together, you have inspired staff to look continually for ways to improve the quality of education at the school. You have created a culture of developing individuals through continuous professional training and have successfully developed new leaders from within the school. This has led to a shared drive for school improvement within all staff. This is reflected in the staff questionnaire, with one teacher commenting, 'As a staff, I feel we share a common vision and we have developed a fantastic teamwork ethic.' You have also sustained an ethos of kindness and caring within the school. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, agree; one parent commented, 'The staff care genuinely about the pupils and work hard to ensure that they are happy.'

Governors know the school well. They visit the school regularly to keep a watching brief on the progress of the school improvement plan. The range of training they have undertaken enables them to hold you and other leaders effectively to account for the difference your work makes to pupils' achievements.

Parents and pupils were keen to tell me about the revised curriculum. This has given pupils opportunities to write independently and at length, helping to raise standards in pupils' writing. It has inspired pupils' excitement and enjoyment across different subjects. Recently, for instance, pupils in Years 3 and 4 created a historical production and performed it at a professional theatre for parents and the community. Years 4 and 5 devised and delivered Roman and Anglo Saxon workshops for other local schools, and Years 1 and 2 ran a stargazing event.

You have wasted no time in tackling a dip in standards in key stages 1 and 2 last year and in addressing areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. The latter included making sure that the most able pupils were doing as well as they could in mathematics, especially in Years 1 and 3; you were also asked to make sure that teachers used effective questioning methods to check pupils' understanding.

New subject leaders are working closely with colleagues from other schools to sharpen the accuracy of their assessment procedures for writing and mathematics. They are aware that they need to track the progress of groups of pupils more rigorously so that planning meets the needs of all pupils, especially the most able. This, together with additional training in the teaching of mathematics and writing, has resulted in pupils making more rapid progress than previously. For example, additional strategies are being taught in mathematics so that all pupils have a wider range of skills to draw on when reasoning and problem solving. Many more pupils are now on track to achieve higher levels in both writing and mathematics than last year. However, you and your leaders are not complacent. You are aware that, in some year groups, teachers' expectations of what pupils, especially the most able pupils, can achieve need to rise further.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors place a high priority on keeping pupils safe. Procedures for entry to the school are stringent. All checks and procedures for recruiting staff safely are carried out and recorded diligently. Systems for reporting concerns about pupils are well established and clear to all staff. There is evidence to show that the school works closely with other agencies to protect pupils from neglect or abuse.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they are confident adults will act to resolve any issues they may have. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' understanding of how to manage their own feelings and deal with anxieties. For example, pupils learn how to relax in a 'stretching club'. All pupils have been taught how to stay safe on the internet and older pupils take responsibility as digital leaders, helping to lead assemblies on cyber safety. Pupils take pride in their school and take their responsibilities (for example, as playground buddies) seriously, helping the younger children to play happily.

Parents report that their children love school. This is reflected in pupils' above-average attendance and prompt arrival at school. Groups of pupils who were persistently absent in the past now attend school regularly. Any pupil's absence is

followed up promptly and there is compelling evidence of effective support for families experiencing difficulties.

Inspection findings

- A key focus of this inspection was to explore the reasons for weaker outcomes last year in key stage 1 and the actions the school has taken to ensure better outcomes this year. Inspection activities also focused on how good progress was in mathematics, particularly for most able pupils. I also looked at whether the few disadvantaged pupils were making good progress.
- In 2014 and 2015, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in key stage 1 achieved above expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Proportions reaching the higher levels were close to or above national figures. Standards dipped in 2016 in key stage 1 and, for boys, in key stage 2. You have made improving outcomes in key stage 1 a priority. More effective teaching than in the past has resulted in accelerated progress in Year 1 and has sustained expected progress in Year 2. In both year groups, a greater proportion of pupils are on track to achieve a greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics than has been the case in the past.
- More rigorous use of assessment information in key stage 2 has resulted in better teaching for small groups of pupils at risk of underachievement. As a result, pupils now make more progress, especially in Years 5 and 6 where their progress is rapid. A greater proportion of pupils are working at higher levels than last year in all year groups, including boys and those pupils with prior middle attainment. You rightly recognise, however, that subject leaders do not track the outcomes for all groups sufficiently sharply so that teachers can be held fully to account for the progress that pupils make. You also agree that not all teachers have high enough expectations for the most able pupils.
- There are very small numbers of disadvantaged pupils in each year group. Over time, disadvantaged pupils have generally achieved at least in line with, and in some areas more highly than, other pupils nationally. The rigour with which you address barriers to their academic learning and emotional well-being through additional support and close liaison with parents, involving them in their children's learning, is a strength of the school.
- Children get off to a very good start in Reception and the new leader of the early years is held in high esteem by parents. One parent commented, 'The Reception staff are exceptional at understanding the individuality of each child.' Many parents spoke of how good communication was with staff in early years and how well their children were progressing. Since the last inspection, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the early years foundation stage has been well above average. Assessments indicate this level of achievement will be sustained for pupils currently in Reception.
- You and your deputy headteacher have supported new subject leaders in English and mathematics very well. They are passionate about school improvement and have worked closely with colleagues from other schools to share ideas and ensure accuracy in assessment. They have explored effectively what working at

greater depth in writing and mathematics looks like. This has begun to lead to greater challenge for pupils in their learning.

- The English leader has had a positive impact on the quality of handwriting and presentation in books. Writing independently and at greater length has led to a rise in standards. The new mathematics curriculum is helping pupils to develop their reasoning when tackling complex problems. The English and mathematics leaders both recognise, however, that they now need to monitor carefully the progress of specific groups of pupils in each year group, so that none fall behind.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new and existing subject leaders assess the progress of all groups of pupils in each year, so they can hold teachers more fully to account for their progress
- expectations are raised for the most able pupils so that they are challenged further to achieve the excellent standards 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 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

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I observed the quality of learning with you in all year groups. I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information; the school improvement plan; leaders' self-evaluation; pupils' work; and child protection procedures and policies. I observed behaviour at playtime. As well as talking to pupils in lessons, I met with a group from different year groups to talk about their learning. I jointly looked at a range of pupils' books with your middle leaders. I viewed the 63 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 21 questionnaires from staff and 139 responses from pupils. At the beginning of the day, I had conversations with parents and carers.