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30 March 2017

Mr John Gray
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gray

Short inspection of Stelling Minnis Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school has had significant staffing changes since the last inspection, and a new chair of the governing body. You have worked tirelessly to confront and eradicate weak teaching through the appropriate processes and procedures. Throughout this challenging time, you have worked closely with senior leaders and governors to ensure that a good standard of education has been maintained. Pupils are well prepared for secondary education. Overall, standards for all pupils are above national average in writing, in line with national averages in mathematics and well above the national average in reading. Disadvantaged pupils, however, did not achieve as well as other pupils nationally.

It is clear you have the confidence of parents and staff. Parents I spoke to informally at the start of the day told me, 'We cannot speak highly enough of the school.'

You have lost no time in tackling the impact that previously ineffective teaching has had on current Year 6 pupils. You have put in place measures to support pupils so that any gaps in their understanding are quickly addressed. This has led to accelerated progress and rising standards. Year 5 and 6 pupils are enjoying being taught mathematics in smaller groups. 'I absolutely love this group and I love

maths', was the response of one Year 6 pupil to the change. Progress from Year 2 to Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics is now good.

The impact of your leadership is evident in the good progress and outcomes for children in the early years. From starting points which are typical for their age, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development in the early years has been above the national average every year since 2014. Children currently in the early years are on track to maintain these same high standards.

Your current plans are ambitious for the school, but strategies to check the progress made by different groups of pupils during the course of the year are not sufficiently effective.

The school has responded to the last inspection report by giving pupils opportunities to apply what they have learned to real life. A 'what's my job?' day involved parents coming into school and sharing how they applied their learning to real life.

Mathematics problems are based on everyday situations, and pupils write about first-hand experiences. Standards have risen significantly in phonics due to more regular and effective teaching. As a result, in 2016 the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in Year 1 was greater than those found nationally. Middle leaders are more confident in their role, having taken national professional qualifications for subject leaders. This has led to more rigorous monitoring of the impact of their advice to teachers.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are appropriately detailed and of high quality. All checks for the recruitment of staff suitable to work with pupils are in place. Clear systems are in place for making referrals when concerns arise. Links with external agencies are strong, including those with the local authority. Staff know families and the wider community well and parents told me that they value the prompt action the school takes if any concerns arise.

The school site is secure and well-maintained. Pupils at the school feel safe. The older pupils look after the younger ones well on the playground. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They feel confident that if they have a problem staff will sort it out.

Rigorous systems are in place to check why pupils are absent and to hold parents to account. You have convincing evidence to show why individual pupils were absent. You follow up persistent absence on an individual basis. Parents appreciate the support you provide when absence is due to long-term illness. Attendance has improved over the past year to be above the national average.

Inspection findings

- The focus of this inspection was to identify how well disadvantaged pupils were being supported through the use of premium funding, so that they achieve as well as other pupils nationally. Inspection activities also focused on whether all pupils, in particular middle-ability and most-able pupils, were being challenged to work at higher standards. I also looked at whether leaders and managers had the capacity to sustain the school's good performance.
- You have adjusted how the needs of disadvantaged pupils are met by tailoring support more effectively to individual need and having a more rigorous system of assessing the impact of interventions. The vast majority of disadvantaged pupils are on track to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Recognising that pupils in Year 2 underachieved in mathematics last year, 'catch-up' sessions have enabled the majority of them to make accelerated progress in Year 3. You recognise, however, that in order for more pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, to reach higher standards and work at greater depth that progress needs to accelerate further.
- The effectiveness of the governing body has been improved. The new chair of the governing body leads a very committed team. Rigorous recruitment processes have led to the governing body being at full strength and having a wider range of skills. Governors are beginning to carry out more focused monitoring to check improvements. They have been supported by the local authority in their understanding of performance information. This has enabled governors to keep a closer eye on pupils' performance. However, governors do not look closely enough at the progress that groups of pupils are making through the year.
- Under strong leadership, a range of strategies to improve outcomes in mathematics at greater depth are starting to bear fruit. There is also a whole-school focus on improving pupils' reasoning skills. In Year 5, pupils enjoyed the challenge of choosing either a 'mild', 'hot' or 'spicy' mathematical task. Many chose to tackle the most difficult, 'spicy', task. Although they do not always succeed, the mathematical reasoning they demonstrate is good. Well-directed additional support is helping to raise standards for those pupils who are not working at the expected level. In 2016, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in mathematics was above national averages. However, not all current pupils who left the early years at a good level of development are yet on track to exceed expected progress.
- Standards, including working at greater depth in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1, have been above those nationally for the last three years. The proportion of pupils working at greater depth in reading, however, is below national expectations. As a result, specific support programmes have been put in place to raise standards in reading in the early years and key stage 1, and progress is accelerating.
- Pupils maximise their learning by being on task and engaged throughout their lessons. They support one another in their learning through discussion and they

take pride in their efforts.

- Year 6 most-able pupils benefit from attending specialist lessons in mathematics, writing, science, art and music at 'hub-days' with other local Year 6 pupils. They say that they find these lessons interesting and fun.
- Progress in writing is good in pupils' books across year groups and subjects. Pupils edit their work effectively and know what they have to do to improve. They have opportunities to write at length and their final pieces of work are a source of great pride to them.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils with prior middle-ability and the most able disadvantaged pupils make greater progress in mathematics and writing, so that more reach the higher standards and work at greater depth
- they further develop the strategies for checking the progress made by different groups of pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Canterbury, 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, you and I observed learning in all classes. I considered a range of evidence including the school's latest assessment information, the school improvement plan, the school's self-assessment, and work in pupils' books. I held several meetings with you and your middle and senior leaders. I also met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I visited the breakfast club and the after-school club. I talked to pupils about their learning and took account of 57 pupil and 10 staff views through questionnaires. I viewed the 60 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. At the beginning of the day, I had a number of discussions with parents and carers.