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27 June 2018

Mr Simon Thurston
Head of School
Beckley Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Thurston

Short inspection of Beckley Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since you became the head of school in September 2016, you have worked effectively to bring about stability in leadership following a period of turbulence after the previous inspection. You have been supported well by an executive headteacher who has worked with you for one day a week.

You lead with a sense of calm and purpose. You have an accurate view of what the school does well and what could be even better. Your outward-looking approach to the school's continual improvement has meant that you welcome being part of a federation. You take advantage of the opportunities that joint working within the federation brings and are keen to develop the partnership further.

A successful aspect of your leadership is the way in which you have developed the skills and confidence of middle leaders so that they play a full part in the school's improvement. Middle leaders work well together to make frequent checks on the quality of teaching and provide effective support to staff.

The federation governors know the school very well. They have an accurate overview of its priorities and offer effective challenge and support. As a result of leaders' and governors' determined drive for continuous improvement, this is a good and improving school.

The previous inspection report asked leaders to improve teaching by ensuring that expectations are consistently high and work is sufficiently challenging. Leaders were also asked to improve pupils' progress in writing.

Since joining the school, you have, rightly, focused on improving the quality of teaching. You have created a culture in which teachers reflect on their practice and work collaboratively to develop their skills. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving. However, you recognise that, although there is strong teaching in the school, there is more to do to make sure that this high-quality teaching is consistent across all classes.

There has been a great deal of work to improve pupils' progress in writing. The impact of this was evident, for example, in the marked improvement in pupils' outcomes in 2017. However, you are determined to raise outcomes still further. You have identified that increasing the consistency of high-quality teaching will support pupils' better progress in writing, as well as in other subjects.

It was a pleasure talking with your pupils. I was impressed with how confidently they talked about their school, their learning and what they enjoy. Several Year 6 pupils told me that they feel well prepared for secondary school. All the pupils I spoke with said that their teachers are kind and that pupils behave well. Pupils are proud of the way that older pupils help the younger ones. As one pupil said, 'There's a friend for everyone at our school.'

The school's Christian values, particularly the need to care for each other, are very evident. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. They are complimentary about the care their children receive. 'The staff are always friendly and always listen, and are ready to address any of my worries, if they arise' and 'The school is fantastic, with its own sense of community. The children and staff all value each other' were typical of the views expressed by parents.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You, staff and governors are highly committed to ensuring that pupils are safe and have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You make sure that training for staff and governors is up to date. Reminders about safeguarding are given to staff during weekly staff meetings. You, as the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), and your deputy DSL work closely with families to support vulnerable pupils.

Pupils are fully confident that they feel safe in school. They are taught how to be safe and keep safe in different situations, for example when using the internet. They told me how much they appreciate knowing that there is always an adult in school they can talk to if they have any worries. This is a very nurturing, caring school in which pupils thrive.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's work, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding; the achievement of disadvantaged pupils; how well teaching in key stage 1 supports pupils' strong progress; and the effectiveness of school leaders in improving pupils' achievement in writing.
- You and your staff know each disadvantaged pupil well. You make frequent checks on their achievement and ensure that additional support is given when needed. This support is targeted appropriately on pupils' individual needs. Governors keep a very close eye on the impact of the support provided. As a result, the evidence in pupils' books shows that, overall, disadvantaged pupils currently in school make good progress.
- Although the standards that Year 6 pupils reached in writing in 2017 were higher than the national average, pupils' achievement in writing lagged behind their very high achievement in reading and mathematics. This is why continuing to improve the teaching of writing has been an ongoing part of your school improvement plan.
- You have successfully improved the teaching of phonics. Staff training, together with focused additional support tailored to pupils' needs, has resulted in improvements in pupils' phonics knowledge. Early indications from the Year 1 phonics screening check are that the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard this year is likely to be significantly higher than in 2017. Pupils' books also show that they develop an appropriate understanding of spelling rules.
- The curriculum provides exciting and memorable learning opportunities. This encourages pupils to write interesting pieces. For example, pupils told me how much they enjoyed using their computing skills to write a newspaper article about Howard Carter as part of their Egyptian topic, and writing about their trip to a local castle. Year 6 pupils showed confidence when writing to justify their opinions about whether a fictional character should 'step into the unknown'. Pupils told me that these types of exciting activities are typical. As a result of your focus, pupils' achievement in writing has improved. However, you are not complacent and your school improvement plan has appropriate actions to raise achievement in writing still further.
- In 2017, pupils' progress in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was in the top 10% of all schools nationally. However, pupils' progress in key stage 1 is much less strong than that in key stage 2. You recognise that there is more to be done to ensure that the very effective practice, for example in the upper part of the school, is shared so that all pupils benefit from consistently strong teaching.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- good practice is shared across the school so that all teaching is of a consistently high quality.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanna Toulson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I spent most of the day with you, discussing your views of the school, observing teaching and learning in classrooms, talking to pupils and looking at their work. I met with a group of pupils to capture their views of school life and considered 27 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. I took account of 10 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I spoke to several parents at the start of the school day and took account of 35 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, and the 21 free-text comments. I met with your middle leaders and deputy DSL. I had a telephone conversation with the local authority's representative. I also met representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I looked a range of documentation, including that related to safeguarding, the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the minutes of the governing body's meetings.