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Mrs J Ayres
Headteacher
St Mary's Bentworth Church of England Primary School
Church Street
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Dear Mrs Ayres

Short inspection of St Mary's Bentworth Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 January 2016, 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 July 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are passionate about children being at the heart of everything you do. To that end, you have taken some difficult decisions to ensure that the quality of teaching remains good across the school. Several of the parents I spoke to commented on the improvements under your leadership. The staff describe you as inspirational and say they feel privileged to work at the school. They feel very well supported to develop their skills and be innovative in their teaching.

There is a strong sense of community and relationships between parents, staff, governors and pupils are positive. You recognise that communication with parents is fundamental to getting the best for the pupils and you have developed effective systems to communicate regularly, both electronically and face-to-face. This has created a culture of trust and openness. Feedback from some of the parents I spoke to suggests that your efforts are recognised and appreciated.

The head boy and girl say that the school is special because everyone knows and takes care of each other. They describe the school as 'small but mighty because we can accomplish great things!' Pupils appreciate the enjoyable lessons they have in class, but are particularly enthusiastic about the unique events the school offers. Examples of these include Year 6's 'The Apprentice' project, which raised funds for

charity, and the 'resilience day', reflecting on moral and social decisions, which took place during the inspection. Nelson Mandela's bodyguard spoke about his experiences, and pupils considered ways in which people were and are discriminated against.

Pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics across the school, reflecting the good-quality teaching they receive. Occasionally, some groups of pupils appear to do slightly less well than others, but the numbers of pupils in these groups are too few to be considered as a reliable indicator. The exception to this is the most-able pupils who achieve very well at Key Stage 1, but do not always reach the highest level at the end of Key Stage 2.

You have tackled the weaknesses identified in the previous report well. Pupils in all classes know exactly what they need to achieve by the end of each lesson and are clear about their targets. Teachers now consistently mark work in line with the school's policy, and comments help pupils to know what they need to do next. The curriculum now provides opportunities for pupils to apply their English and computing skills. Pupils learn about diversity, tolerance and justice, such as through the 'challenging prejudice' day.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding processes are rigorous and effective. Staff records are detailed and easily accessible. Governors are appropriately involved in checking safeguarding and carry out a detailed audit annually to identify any further improvements needed. Policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are up to date and staff receive regular training which ensures they know, and are confident about, their responsibilities in keeping the children safe. You have a thorough knowledge of individual pupils' situations and ensure their pastoral needs are met well. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

All parents who expressed their views, either verbally or through the Ofsted survey, Parent View, are rightly confident in the school's work to care for pupils and ensure that they are safe. Pupils feel safe and say they are well cared for because all the staff know them personally. They learn about road and fire safety, know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and take part in self-defence lessons.

Inspection findings

- Following a very long period of stability, the last few years have seen a significant turnover in staff. Since joining the school three years ago, you have demonstrated unwavering determination to maintain standards by securing high-quality teachers. The governors have supported and challenged you rigorously during this period of change to ensure that risks, such as appointing newly qualified teachers to three of the four teaching posts, are calculated and well managed.

- Governors know the school very well and their work reflects the same aspirations and rigour that you demonstrate. They have useful discussions about all the aspects of the school in which they are involved, including performance management, achievement of the most-able pupils and safeguarding. The governor action plan helps them to maintain their rigour and effectiveness. On occasions, minutes of some of the challenging discussions are not recorded as well as they could be so important information can be overlooked.
- Other leaders are developing well in their new roles. The deputy headteacher is effective in supporting you to raise standards further and has already had a very positive impact on the environment and provision in the early years. The recently appointed subject leaders are enthusiastic about their additional responsibilities and are clear about the key priorities for each of their subjects. You have rightly identified that their development is a priority for the school to improve learning further.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve well. In 2015, all children in the early years reached a good level of development, which is well above the previous year and national figures. In the Year 1 phonics check, the percentage who reached the expected level was in line with the national average. You are confident that the new approach to phonics has already helped to improve pupils' skills, and this is reflected in their work.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is consistently very high in reading, writing and mathematics, with many pupils reaching the higher level. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age at the end of Key Stage 2 is also above average. However, the very high attainment from Key Stage 1 is not always sustained because some of the most-able pupils do not achieve at the highest level. Pupils with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points due to the very good support provided.
- Teaching is good. Lessons interest pupils and meet their learning needs. Teachers consistently check how well they are learning in lessons and work effectively with individuals and groups to help them make more progress. Teaching assistants provide good support; they ask useful questions and support learning, without giving pupils too much help.
- The recently introduced assessment system is being used across the school to identify pupils' achievements. Teachers are becoming more familiar with the specific objectives and embedding this further should help them to identify next steps more readily. You work closely with teachers to check the progress of each pupil and identify any who are not on track to meet expectations. Where additional help is required, this is carefully planned and checked to make sure it is helping pupils to improve.
- Pupils behave well and approach learning and activities with confidence. They cooperate well with each other and are keen to share their views. They enjoy learning and apply themselves very well in lessons, appreciating the challenges that are provided through the 'nuts' system.
- Your positive collaboration with two local schools is really effective in overcoming some of the limitations of a small school, such as budgetary restrictions. An example of this is the physical education leader who works

across all three schools. Similarly, the theme day would not have been affordable for one school.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is supported very well through topics and celebrations, as well as discussions at collective worship assemblies. Pupils learn about a range of other faiths and compare them to Christianity.
- Early years provision is good. At the previous inspection it was judged to be outstanding but, following a number of staff changes, the quality of teaching went through a decline. You took action last year to raise standards, which resulted in all the children doing well. The deputy headteacher has continued to build on your good work by improving the environment, resources and assessment. She is now rightly focusing her attention on making sure that activities meet the needs of all the children, especially the most able.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new curriculum and assessment systems are embedded so that teachers can easily check how well pupils are doing and be clear what they need to do next
- the most-able pupils are challenged to achieve as much as they can
- recently appointed middle leaders continue to develop well so that they can further improve the learning in their subject areas.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Winchester and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, teachers and a representative from the local authority. I also spoke to a representative from the diocese. I met with the Year 5 pupils and the head boy and girl. With you, I visited classes and I scrutinised work in pupils' books. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and around the school. I spoke to some parents and considered the responses of 32 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.