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Mrs Jodi Hacker
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Dear Mrs Hacker

Short inspection of Hawkhurst Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Since taking up your appointment in September 2017, you have established an effective working relationship with the governing body and staff. You and senior leaders know the school well. Leaders and governors have high aspirations to help all pupils achieve their potential in line with the school motto, 'Extending Horizons'. Staff are proud to be part of an effective team and enjoy working at the school. Together, you have the confidence of parents, carers and the wider community to lead the school forward.

The whole staff team works closely together to make sure that each pupil gets the help they need. All pupils are known as individuals and supported effectively to take part in school activities. Pupils are cared for well. As a result, they settle into school quickly. Pupils behave well and enjoy their time in school.

During our visits to classrooms, we saw examples of enthusiastic teaching that inspired pupils to take part in a range of activities. Pupils like working together and discussing their learning. Staff question pupils skilfully to help them think carefully and to learn quickly. Pupils enjoy taking part in a variety of activities, including planning adventure stories, investigating graphs and building shelters in 'forest school'. As a result of good teaching, most pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, currently, too few of the most able pupils attain the higher standards in reading and mathematics.

Pupils are polite. They are keen to talk about their school and speak happily and confidently. They enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities including cycle training, gymnastics, scooter club and singing, which contribute effectively to their personal development. Pupils say that they enjoy being challenged. However, some pupils would like more challenging work to make them think even harder.

Leaders have maintained the strengths recognised at the previous inspection. These included leadership, the quality of teaching and pupils' good rates of progress, the early years, and pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Inspectors at the previous inspection also identified the need for the most able pupils to be challenged more quickly, increased opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking and extra advice to help pupils improve their mathematics. As a result of greater challenge in writing, pupils' attainment is now similar to that of their peers nationally. In addition, pupils now have time to explain their ideas and discuss their thinking in lessons, and staff provide increasingly useful feedback in mathematics.

Since the previous inspection, school leaders have continued the process of self-review and development planning to identify priorities and improve the school. For example, you have identified accurately the need to focus on improving pupils' outcomes in reading and mathematics. Leaders monitor the plan's implementation carefully. However, as we discussed, governors do not currently have a refined understanding of assessment information on pupils' progress and attainment. As a consequence, governors are not able to question underachievement in any detail to ensure that staffing and resources are used to best effect to raise standards.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are trained at an appropriate level and records are up to date. As a result of regular training, staff know how to keep pupils safe and what to do if they have a concern. When appropriate, leaders work with outside agencies to provide effective support for pupils and families.

Pupils know they can talk to staff if they have any concerns and they are confident that action will be taken. The curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe. For example, they have a good knowledge of e-safety and can explain clearly how to report problems. The school's website contains a range of useful information for parents. All parents and staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are confident the pupils are safe at school.

The school is maintained well and is being improved constantly. The addition of forest school helps pupils to learn about safety risks and how to manage them.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on how effectively school leaders are continuing to raise standards in reading at key stages 1 and 2; the progress of disadvantaged pupils, particularly the most able disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics; and how successfully leaders are improving pupils' attendance.

- Leaders analyse tracking information regularly and have accurately identified progress in reading as a point for action. Pupils enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about their books. Staff teach phonics confidently and skilfully. As a result, pupils learn phonics rapidly and use this knowledge routinely when reading. Leaders are strengthening the curriculum further by enriching the school's resources and through special events. As a consequence, pupils' progress in reading is beginning to accelerate. However, currently too few pupils are attaining the higher standards.
- Leaders use extra funding for disadvantaged pupils successfully. For example, they run a breakfast club so that pupils get a good start in the mornings. Staff use tracking information effectively to identify where pupils need to catch up. Support is provided for families, and extra adults work successfully with pupils in class and in groups. Consequently, many disadvantaged pupils make good progress.
- In mathematics lessons there is good support, including extra equipment, to help those disadvantaged pupils who need to catch up. Additional staff work with individuals and groups, asking questions and working through examples. However, there is not the same carefully targeted support to extend the problem-solving and reasoning skills of the most able disadvantaged pupils. As a consequence, they are still not making the progress of which they are capable to achieve the higher standards in mathematics.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is below average. This includes the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders monitor attendance closely, and effective steps are now being taken to improve the attendance of the small number of pupils who are persistently absent. Pupils and their families are provided with support as needed, for example by the family liaison officer. Pupils appreciate the rewards for attending school and being punctual. Pupils know that it is important to come to school to learn, and that a phone call home is made if they are absent. As a result, the attendance rate for all groups is now rising strongly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are challenged consistently to enable them to achieve higher standards in reading and mathematics
- governors refine their understanding of assessment information so that they can identify patterns of underachievement and ensure that staffing and resources are used even more effectively to raise standards.

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

Rosemary Addison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I also met a group of pupils from Years 1 to 6. I met two representatives from the local authority. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the diocese. You accompanied me on visits to all classrooms, where I observed learning, spoke to pupils and looked at their work. I looked at a range of mathematics and literacy books, and I heard some pupils read. I observed pupils' behaviour in the classrooms and around the school. I took into account 49 responses to Parent View and 49 free-text responses. I also considered 17 online questionnaires from staff and 20 from pupils. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information on the school's website, safety records, minutes of meetings, various policies and pupils' progress information.