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Ms Susan Wilcox
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Wilcox

Short inspection of Dewhurst St Mary CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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.

Dewhurst St Mary CofE Primary is a school that is a very happy and purposeful place for children to learn. Your compassionate leadership is much appreciated by parents and staff alike. You provide effectively for the educational and pastoral care for pupils. Everyone willingly follows your core values – Dream, Achieve, Believe – underpinned by a strong Christian ethos.

You are ably supported by your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. They are skilled and well placed to continue a strong focus on pupils making the best personal and academic progress. Parents are extremely positive about the work of the school. One parental comment summed up the sentiments of many others: 'This is a fantastic school. I couldn't hope for a better place for my children to grow in education.'

Governors have an accurate and detailed view of what is working well and what could be even better still. They have specific roles and responsibilities and are dedicated to their work. They visit the school often to check the safety and well-being of pupils. Governors effectively hold school leaders to account for the progress that pupils make in all aspects of their education.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive and proud to work at the school. Many go above and beyond to provide additional activities for pupils at lunchtime and after school. You have been successful in recruiting new staff to the school where needed. Staff commented that they are well supported in their roles. You provide the professional development they need to improve their practice. As a result, pupils make good progress over their time at school.

You have maintained the high standard of pupil behaviour across the school since the previous inspection. Pupils' positive approach continues to be a strength. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided with timely support and well-considered activities that meet their needs well.

Pupils are keen to learn and enthusiastic for the many challenges they receive in their lessons. For example, some of the pupils told me how they were going to work swiftly on their mathematics activities so that they could choose a task from the 'challenge box'. Pupils told me how they enjoy their learning. One pupil explained that 'I love learning about the myths and characters and then writing about them.'

Pupils take an obvious pride in their work. Books are well presented and teachers use the school's marking and feedback policies effectively to help pupils improve their work, particularly in English and mathematics. You recognise that the same approach is not yet as consistent across all subjects.

Children start well in the early years class. Children enter the school with skills and abilities that are generally typical for their age. Children are enthusiastic for their learning and enjoy playing together, discussing with their friends their ideas. The proportion of pupils who achieve a good level of development continues to rise and has been in line with national averages over the previous two years. The proportion of children who exceed expectations in some areas of the early years curriculum is increasing.

The mark of your careful and considered leadership is how well you and other leaders keep improving the provision and set precise goals for the school to achieve. Your improvement plans accurately identify that you want pupils to excel even further, particularly those who are most able. You work closely with the local authority to ensure that your staff receive the precise training and support they need to continue to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, place the highest priority on keeping pupils safe and providing strong pastoral care for pupils. Leaders have been successful in creating a secure and caring environment in which pupils and staff have confidence and feel valued.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet current requirements. Recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff. Leaders and

governors are rigorous in ensuring that the necessary recruitment checks have been effectively carried out. Documents and school records are meticulously kept.

Leaders and governors ensure that staff are well informed. Staff receive regular training both formally and through regular staff updates. They are suitably qualified and confident to implement the school's safeguarding policies.

Parents overwhelmingly agreed that their children are kept safe and very well cared for. Many parents shared the view that 'the entire staff from the management team, teachers and teaching assistants genuinely care for and take care of the children.'

Around the school, there are a wealth of posters and recommendations about how pupils can keep themselves safe when using the internet. Leaders have held parent evenings to support parents in keeping their children safe when online. Leaders had evidence of dealing effectively with social media issues and concerns.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to consider how well the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieve. This was because the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standard by the end of key stage 2 in 2016 and 2017 was below the national average.
- This academic year you have made this issue a priority for your school improvement planning. You have targeted more pupils to achieve the higher standard, including those who are disadvantaged.
- Pupils respond well to the different challenges teachers provide in both English and mathematics. The most able pupils have more opportunity to extend their learning and make better progress as a result. Pupils told me that they enjoy the challenges they are provided with, particularly in mathematics. Work in pupils' books is well presented and demonstrates their perseverance when practising skills.
- Teaching in key stage 2 is strong. Your staff are increasingly confident when assessing pupils' progress. They use this information effectively to plan learning opportunities that are well matched to individual pupils' needs. Due to the precise feedback they receive from their teachers, pupils, particularly those in Years 5 and 6, are clear how they can improve their work. Consequently, pupils, especially the most able, are making strong progress.
- In key stage 1 in 2017, more pupils reached greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics than found nationally. This achievement demonstrates that the most able pupils continued to make good progress from their starting points.
- My second line of enquiry was to consider whether vulnerable pupils make good progress and attend well at school. This was because the progress disadvantaged pupils made by the end of key stage 2 was less than others, particularly in writing and mathematics. Equally, the attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was in the lowest 10% when compared with national averages in 2016 and 2017.

- You know each pupil well and track their achievement regularly and accurately across each class. As leaders, you check the progress that disadvantaged pupils make and provide additional support in a timely way so that they can make as much progress as possible.
- In-school assessment information and evidence from pupils' work in books demonstrates that, currently, disadvantaged pupils make similar and often better progress than their peers. Inspection evidence demonstrates that better quality of teaching, learning and assessment this year is already reaping rewards. Each individual is given precise feedback to help pupils improve their work, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The school's published results from 2017 do not demonstrate the wealth of additional and often creative support vulnerable pupils receive so that they can make good progress. Governors recognise that the information on the website regarding how they use additional funds does not fully illustrate how effectively they use extra funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Individual pupils who have complex needs are particularly well cared for. As a result, they make personal as well as academic progress.
- You make sure that families of disadvantaged pupils for whom low attendance is a barrier to their learning receive suitable support and challenge from the pupil and parent support worker. As a result, parents are supported to access the agencies and information they need to help their child attend well.
- Where pupils do not attend school well enough, you are prepared to make use of warning notices, especially for those who are persistently absent. You also celebrate where pupils have 100% attendance, and in 2017, over 10% of the school achieved this recognition. You recognise that attendance remains just below the national average overall and this is a priority for the school.
- Another area I considered during the inspection was the progress that children make in early years. This was because, in the previous inspection, there was not a separate judgement made about the quality of education in early years. Also, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has been increasing each year and I considered whether this upward trend had continued for children who left Reception in July 2017.
- In 2017, the proportion of children who left Reception achieving a good level of development increased again. Year-on-year, children make improved progress from their individual starting points. Staff understand their needs well and plan learning activities that help children develop their confidence and skills.
- Children have settled well into the routines and expectations of Reception. They respond well to instructions and are enthusiastic for their learning. Parents agree that this is the case. One parent commented: 'Although my daughter has just started, she is extremely happy as are we her parents, we are seeing her progress with reading and spelling already.'
- The classroom environment is well resourced so that children can develop their interests and access learning across all the areas of the early years curriculum.

Similarly in the outside area, children can explore for themselves in a safe and secure setting.

- Opportunities for writing were not as evident outside as they were in class. The proportion of pupils who reach the standard expected for their age in writing is less consistent and is an area to improve further.
- My final line of enquiry was to consider what leaders are doing to ensure that pupils make good progress across the curriculum. This was because the information on the website was not compliant regarding the curriculum provision. Parents are unable to check what their children are learning in each class over each term. Pupils' attainment in science, while in line with national averages at the end of key stage 2 in 2017, was below that achieved by pupils in English and mathematics.
- Pupils have access to a balanced curriculum. As leaders, you provide additional trips and themed days so that every pupil's experience is enhanced. In Year 4, for example, pupils are particularly enjoying learning about the ancient Greeks. In Years 5 and 6, some pupils were away on a residential trip on the day of the inspection. Others were developing their research skills through a topic on the Royal Family. Some of the art work these pupils produced was of a very high quality.
- Your subject leaders track the coverage of the curriculum and the progress pupils make over the year. Staff send progress reports to parents regularly about how well pupils are doing across the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, reaching the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 increases and is at least in line with the national average
- children in the early years have sufficient opportunity to develop their writing skills so that more achieve the expected standard for their age
- attendance is at least in line with that nationally and all groups of pupils attend well
- the website is up to date to communicate the effective work of the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of St Albans and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the parent and pupil support worker, the school office personnel and seven representatives of the governing body. I spoke informally with pupils during lessons and at lunchtime to consider their views.
- I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning in every class, jointly with you. I evaluated pupils' current work across all subjects and a wide range of abilities.
- I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for continued improvement, a sample of assessment information, minutes of governors' meetings and documents relating to attendance.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the designated safeguarding lead.
- I took account of 32 parent responses that were provided during the inspection time to the online survey, Parent View, together with 20 free-text comments.
- The views of staff were considered from 16 responses to the staff online questionnaire.