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Mrs Natasha Chiswell
Headteacher
Aldbury Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Chiswell

Short inspection of Aldbury Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Since you took up your post two years ago, you have developed an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You are appropriately self-critical in your evaluation of the school. You are also realistic and accurate in your judgements about how good the school is. Your improvement plan focuses on the right priorities. As a result, the school is good and improving. You are fully aware that there is work still to do to improve the progress pupils make in writing.

Pupils love their school. They enjoy their learning and work hard. They say that everyone behaves well, both during lessons and during breaktimes. Pupils are thoughtful and considerate. They are confident, polite and welcoming to visitors. Pupils show good understanding of equality and excellent attitudes to people who share a characteristic protected by law.

Parents are very supportive of the school and express high levels of satisfaction with it. Almost three-quarters of parents responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Of those that responded, almost all would recommend the school to others. Many chose to leave additional text comments such as: 'My children benefit from a very positive approach to learning at this school.' Another said that they were 'really pleased that my children attend a school where they are happy, feel safe, have fun and learn'. Many parents chose to comment on your leadership

specifically. Statements such as 'Mrs Chiswell is a fantastic headteacher and a blessing to the school' and 'this school is very well run with an able headmistress and caring staff' were typical.

Governors have ensured that the areas for development from the previous inspection have been tackled well. Governors display a particularly strong knowledge of the school and of education more generally. They are open, honest and accurate in their responses. They know the school's priorities for further development very well and have the skills and experience necessary to hold you and the school fully to account. The proficiency, skills and knowledge of the governing body are a strength of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's single central record of pre-employment checks meets statutory requirements. The document is well maintained and checked regularly by leaders and governors. The school's approach to ensuring that only suitable people are employed to work with children is thorough, well organised and given an appropriately high priority.

You have an excellent understanding of the role of designated safeguarding lead. You rightly prioritise this aspect of your role and you understand fully the school's vital role in keeping children safe. The school's child protection records are now of good quality as a result of the thorough audit carried out by you and the senior teacher. The detailed chronologies at the front of each child protection file mean that patterns are easy to identify and it is highly unlikely that a pupil would be able to 'fall between the cracks'. Pupils feel safe at school. They say that there is very little bullying and, when it does occur, it is sorted out quickly by staff.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. Firstly, I looked at whether current pupils are making good progress in writing. I chose to look at this area because published data shows that, for the last two years, pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 has been some of the lowest in the country.
- Leaders and governors have already identified writing as the school's main priority for improvement. A number of actions have been carried out to improve the quality of pupils' writing. For example, pupils have been given more regular opportunities to write at length in order to build up their writing stamina. This has worked well and pupils now write at much greater length than previously and are making better progress throughout the school.
- Other actions have also have been effective in improving the quality of pupils' writing. For example, teachers have used high-quality books and other texts as stimuli to encourage pupils to want to write. This has worked well and pupils are now much more interested in writing and are keen to be authors. However, the quality of many pupils' writing is held back by poorly formed handwriting,

frequent spelling errors and incorrect use of capital letters. For example, commonly used words such as 'could' and 'said' are misspelled and the standard past tense ('ed' endings) is not used consistently, resulting errors such as 'walkt' for 'walked'.

- The next area that I looked at was phonics and whether recent improvements are sustainable. Results of the Year 1 phonics screening check were notably high in 2017 and well above the national average. This was an enormous improvement on 2016, with about a third more pupils reaching the expected level.
- Leaders' work to improve this area has been highly effective. Leaders have improved staff members' skills in teaching this key area and the consistency with which phonics is taught. For example, leaders focused on ensuring that adults enunciate sounds clearly and precisely in order that pupils are able to identify individual sounds accurately. Leaders have also ensured that phonics sessions are well structured, giving pupils the opportunity to learn, practise and then apply their new knowledge and skills.
- Leaders have worked, and continue to work, with staff throughout the school to improve their subject knowledge and ability to teach phonics effectively. For example, the literacy subject leader has provided phonics workshops for teaching assistants focusing on issues identified during observations of sessions. Assessment of the progress that the current Year 1 pupils are making indicates that a similarly high proportion are likely to reach the expected level in the 2018 phonics screening check. Children in the current Reception class, in their first term at school, are already making good progress with learning phonics.
- The third area that I looked at was whether the most able disadvantaged pupils make the progress that they should. I chose to look at this area because published data suggests that the most able disadvantaged pupils do not do as well as they should. However, the very small number of disadvantaged pupils means that data must be treated with caution.
- There are currently 14 disadvantaged pupils in the school, with two disadvantaged pupils in most year groups. It is, therefore, impossible to draw meaningful conclusions about the progress of a group within this group. Leaders know these pupils very well as individuals. They ensure that appropriate support is put in place for disadvantaged pupils in order to meet their needs. As a result, disadvantaged pupils throughout the school are making good progress, with many making rapid progress.
- My final line of enquiry concerned attendance. I looked at this area because the most recent published attendance figures showed that pupils' absence was too high. I checked whether pupils' attendance has improved and whether any groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.
- Leaders have taken effective action and attendance is improving. The overall attendance figure for the last academic year was just above the national average. Leaders and governors refuse to authorise any holidays during term-time. Despite their best efforts, this continues to be an area that drags pupils' attendance down. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve teaching and learning in writing, particularly handwriting and spelling, so that more pupils make rapid progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils during the day. I took into account the 57 responses to Parent View and 40 free-text comments that were received. I took note of the 18 responses to the staff survey. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you, and looked at pupils' exercise books. I looked at school documents including the single central record of pre-employment checks.