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Mrs Susan Collison
Headteacher
Ashwicken Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Collison

Short inspection of Ashwicken Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Ashwicken Primary has grown in numbers and moved to a larger site, but retains the family feel of a small school. As governors told me, 'We move buildings but take our ethos with us.' The school is a haven of calm and cooperation, with adults and pupils enjoying working together. This was evident in classes and around the school where no cross word was heard throughout the inspection from any adult or pupil. Pupils told me that, 'This is a school for everyone. It fits around your needs.' This reflects their accurate view that all pupils are well known by you and by all adults, who take very good care of them.

Pupils behave exceptionally well, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection. This is because right from the start, adults make clear to children the school's expectations, for example reminding them to cooperate, to listen and to try their best. You and your team set out clearly your expectations of pupils encapsulated in your motto, 'Caring for each other, caring for our world' and pupils respond accordingly.

Pupils also behave well because they enjoy their lessons. One pupil told me, 'We love our lessons because our teachers make it really fun.' This was evident during the inspection where, for example, a teacher had planned a lesson about perimeter where pupils explored how to expand the perimeter of a small piece of paper so that they could step through it. Pupils said, and work in their books confirmed, that this was typical of the types of engaging tasks pupils are given on a regular basis.

Learning at Ashwicken is fun, but you and your team work together effectively to ensure that alongside enjoyment, pupils also achieve well. You, your team and governors are ambitious for every child and determined to ensure that pupils leave the school well prepared for their next stage in education and for future life. You make clear your high expectations of staff, meeting termly to review the tasks you expect of them linked to the school's development plan and to look carefully at the progress of pupils in their class. Together you identify where any pupil may be falling behind and put in place strategies to address this rapidly. Your regular checks on teaching focus clearly on how well pupils are learning, which was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report.

Pupils make good progress in English and mathematics because teachers have high expectations of them. Teachers plan lessons carefully, and check on learning throughout lessons, asking questions that make pupils think hard and using pupils' work as models for others. Pupils said that work was pitched so that it was 'neither too easy nor too hard, but always challenges us'. This is because teachers know pupils' needs well and plan for these especially well in English and mathematics. Pupils are given good opportunities to apply their skills when working on other subjects. For example, pupils produced good-quality writing about the Romans in 'Battle to the Death', and information writing about Mayan civilization. Through tasks such as these, pupils practise and extend their writing skills in different contexts and this contributes to the good progress they make in writing.

Additional adults support learning well, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. During the inspection, additional adults were seen supporting groups and individuals. They explained tasks well and asked appropriate questions to ensure that pupils understood what they were learning about.

Governors provide good support for school leaders. They have confidence in you but are not afraid to challenge you when necessary. For example, they asked you to explain the disappointing Year 6 reading outcomes last year and what actions were being taken to improve this year's outcomes. Governors visit the school regularly, sometimes visiting classes with subject leads so that they gain a good understanding of what is working well and where further improvements are needed. Governors carefully track all expenditure, ensuring that every penny is well used to promote learning.

The majority of parents are very pleased with everything the school has to offer. Almost every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire said that they would recommend the school to another parent. Typical of the comments made by parents was one who stated, 'This is a great school with dedicated, passionate and committed staff which is well led and managed.'

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of safeguarding is firmly embedded across the school. Every staff meeting provides an opportunity to talk about issues relating to keeping pupils safe or to update staff with any information that has been provided at training or published. Training for staff is kept up to date and covers a wide range of safety issues, from child protection and training in the 'Prevent' duty in spotting signs of radicalisation, through to fire awareness training recently undertaken. As a result, all staff are knowledgeable about how to keep pupils safe.

A robust system is in place for checking on all staff who work at the school and you maintain careful oversight of records of these checks. Records of concerns for individual pupils are well maintained and well organised and all information is kept securely. Concerns from staff are carefully logged and demonstrate that staff are vigilant in looking out for signs that a child may be at risk. You follow up concerns rigorously, for example pursuing additional information from another provider when a child transferred into the school and the records provided were concerning but thin. You ensure that concerns are acted upon by outside agencies where necessary. You and the second designated leader for safeguarding work together effectively to regularly review concerns about pupils to ensure that nothing gets missed.

All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire said that their child feels safe at school and pupils also rightly told me that the school is a very safe place.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed that one area to look at closely would be how well reading is taught, including reading comprehension skills. This was because in 2016, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 who achieved the expected standard in reading was below that found nationally. This was in sharp contrast to the high level of achievement in writing and mathematics. You acknowledged that the reading results were very disappointing. You and your team have looked closely at outcomes to identify areas where pupils did not do as well as expected.
- You have acted swiftly to implement changes based on your analysis. These include a greater emphasis on teaching comprehension skills across the whole school on a regular basis and reviewing the school's approach to guided reading sessions. These changes are proving effective. Teachers were able to demonstrate to me through their records that pupils' comprehension skills are improving rapidly. Pupils spoken to during the inspection also demonstrated good skills in responding to questions about the text, including talking about characterisation and the author's use of language.

- The teaching of phonics in early years and key stage 1 provides a firm foundation for reading skills. By introducing more targeted phonic groups, you have successfully increased the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the government's Year 1 phonics screening check, so that almost every child last year reached this standard. You are making sure that this good basis is built upon more successfully to develop pupils' advanced reading skills.
- Alongside this, you have ensured that reading for pleasure continues to be promoted well. Classrooms have attractive reading corners, inviting pupils of all ages to spend time enjoying a book, and you and the governors have agreed to improve the reading stock for older pupils so that books match their interests. As a result, pupils show enthusiasm for and enjoyment of reading.
- This strong focus on promoting reading has yet to be demonstrated by leaders of subjects other than English. Opportunities for enhancing pupils' comprehension skills through subjects such as history and geography, for example, have not been identified and developed as well as they could be to further improve pupils' reading skills.
- A second area that we agreed to look at during the inspection was how well the most able pupils are challenged. This was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. In addition, in 2016, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 who achieved the higher standard in reading and mathematics was lower than that found nationally.
- Evidence in pupils' books and from the school's assessment information demonstrates that the most able pupils are being provided with plenty of challenge in English and mathematics. This was also evident during the inspection, where the most able pupils in Year 1 were grappling with describing a number pattern, developing their reasoning skills through the task. Pupils said that these sorts of problems are commonly provided for them.
- In writing, pupils are given different criteria so that they know what they are expected to include in their writing. As a result, the most able pupils know the high expectations set for them and produce work of a high standard.
- I listened to some of the most able pupils in Year 6 read and asked them about how their skills were developed further. They told me about the range of reading activities provided for them, including steps taken to broaden their vocabulary and the challenging texts they read in class. Consequently, the most able pupils are making good progress in reading.
- Work provided for pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics does not always challenge the most able pupils sufficiently. For example, in some classes, pupils are given the same work to complete in history and no additional challenge is provided for those who are capable of this.
- The third area we agreed to look at during the inspection was how well pupils make progress across subjects other than English and mathematics. This was to ensure that the good progress indicated in English and mathematics was not at the expense of learning in other subjects.

- Pupils' work shows that pupils enjoy a broad curriculum with lots of interesting and engaging opportunities for learning. Learning is also enhanced by a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities, including cookery, fencing and film club.
- Teachers take time to ensure that pupils consolidate their understanding in some subjects. For example, in Year 6, pupils explored shadows, making their own models to explore the impact of being nearer to or further from a light source. As a result, pupils make good progress in some subjects such as science.
- High-quality art work was evident across the school. Pupils learn about different artists and produce work in a similar style. For example, in the Year 4/5 class, pupils made their own self-portraits in the style of Picasso, producing highly effective results.
- Leaders acknowledge that the systems for assessing and recording the progress of pupils in some subjects such as history and geography are not yet firmly embedded. Consequently, some subject leaders are not able to identify clearly where progress is best and where it could be better. Some subject leaders are therefore not taking as much responsibility for driving improvements in their subjects as rigorously as they could be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems for tracking the progress that pupils are making in subjects other than English and mathematics are embedded and used by all subject leaders so that they take greater responsibility for creating and implementing plans for improvement
- teachers more consistently challenge the most able pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, with subject leaders and with three governors. I met with a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I heard a sample of pupils read. I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, safeguarding, development planning and the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes and evaluated pupils' work. I evaluated the school's website and found it to meet requirements on the publication of specified information.