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7 April 2017

Mrs Karen Payne  
Headteacher  
Sherborne St John Church of England Primary School  
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Hampshire  
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Dear Mrs Payne

### **Short inspection of Sherborne St John Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 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 December 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your team have created a caring school where pupils are happy, enjoy learning and make good progress. Parents appreciate the work you and your team do to ensure that your small school is inclusive. One parent commented, 'Everyone is made to feel welcome' and another described it as being, 'like a big family'.

Pupils are well behaved, confident and articulate. They are proud of their school and the leadership roles they can hold. For example, they can apply for roles such as librarians, play leaders or cashiers for the school's building society. One pupil told me, 'Everybody's something.' These responsibilities effectively support pupils' moral, social and cultural development. Teachers use the project-based approach to learning to teach pupils to work effectively in groups. This successfully develops their communication skills and I met pupils who were keen to explain their work and ideas, even if they were finding tasks tricky. Pupils enjoy the projects and describe them as, 'fun'. However, you are aware of the need for ongoing evaluation of this method of teaching the curriculum, to ensure projects contain sufficient challenge, especially for the most able.

You have successfully maintained the strengths of the school identified in the previous inspection report and addressed the recommendations for improvement. In particular, I observed a well-planned range of activities for the Reception Year that

interested and challenged children, and helped them explore and learn for themselves. For example, a group of boys explained to me the forces they were using to move water around. Other children successfully used their phonics learning to write about their recent school trip. Following this successful work, you have worked effectively with governors and school staff to select clear and appropriate priorities to develop the school further.

The high quality of teaching across the school means that pupils make good progress. You closely track pupils' individual attainment to make sure that they are given extra help to catch up if required. These interventions are effective. One parent wrote very positively about the additional support her son was given, saying that the teachers, 'don't give up; they see potential in every child'. The cross-curricular learning projects successfully provide a broad and balanced curriculum. However, information on your school's website does not fully explain the knowledge and skills taught in each subject, for pupils in all year groups. The recent whole-school focus on writing has successfully supported more pupils to achieve greater depth in their work. However, you recognise the need to ensure that your high expectations for the quality of pupils' writing are met across the curriculum.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There are appropriate systems for checking and recording the suitability of adults before they are allowed to work with the pupils. The governor responsible for safeguarding regularly checks the school's records. All adults are well trained and understand their roles and responsibilities for safeguarding the pupils in their care.

Pupils feel safe and well looked after in school. Parents and staff overwhelmingly agree. One parent said: 'There has never been a day where my children have not wanted to come to school.' A small minority of parents raised a concern about behaviour at the school, specifically the effectiveness of the school's work to deal with bullying. All the behaviour I saw was of a very high standard. Pupils were polite and respectful to adults and each other. They worked well in groups and played well together during break and lunchtime. Many pupils told me the behaviours I observed were 'normal,' and that, 'Everyone is nice here.' They said bullying does not really happen at school but, if it does teachers and other adults 'sort it out'. Pupils were involved in the school's review of the behaviour policy and like its clear structure. School leaders have also reviewed the anti-bullying policy and made sensible additions to ensure that parents are fully informed of any actions. The school's logs of incidents and actions taken demonstrate that leaders' work is effective.

### **Inspection findings**

- The cross-curricular projects are carefully designed by leaders and teachers to engage pupils and teach them to apply their learning in different contexts. However, the school's website does not have sufficient information about what each class is studying in each subject. I considered the effectiveness of the

projects and found that they successfully support pupils' learning and prepare them for their next steps. Pupils enjoy the varied activities. For example, in order to explore how birds might evolve to adapt to their habitat, Year 5 and 6 pupils used different tools to pick up foodstuffs. Years 3 and 4 enjoyed using green screen technology to produce information films about the highlights of London, following their recent visit. Years 1 and 2 continued their work on forces by measuring the relative success of toy cars' journeys over different materials. In all cases, pupils clearly and thoughtfully explained to me the purpose of their learning and how it linked in with their project. They also used technical language successfully. For example, a Year 2 pupil explained that he had to keep the same car for all his experiments to ensure his results were valid. Most pupils made good progress in these lessons. However, some of the most able pupils quickly understood the concept investigated and were ready to move on to more challenging work. Providing this work more swiftly would allow these pupils to make more rapid progress.

- I also considered the success of the recent whole-school focus on developing pupils' writing skills. Outcomes in writing are strong, and pupils enjoy the focus on writing for 'real' purposes, for example, national competitions. The school's tracking information and work in pupils' books show that they are making good progress with their writing. Pupils understand the need to carefully select vocabulary, and use punctuation and sentence structures to create specific meaning. Children in Reception Year were rightly proud of their writing and very keen to share it with me. However, in key stage 2 the high standards that have been achieved in literacy and discrete writing lessons are not always evident in pupils' work when writing for other subjects. For example, pupils make errors in their science and religious education books that they do not make in their English books.
- School leaders have successfully addressed the previous inspection report's required improvement in mathematics. They have improved the quality of teaching to raise pupils' rates of progress in mathematics. In the 2016 key stage 2 national tests, a higher proportion of pupils attained the expected level in mathematics than pupils did nationally. Most pupils currently in the school are making good progress in mathematics. Pupils told me that they enjoy mathematics, especially the longer challenges where they apply their learning to a series of problems. I observed pupils working well in pairs and groups to challenge and support each other to solve mathematical problems. They understood how to apply their mathematical knowledge to real life tasks, such as working with timetables, and did so with some success. Teachers carefully track pupils' understanding and plan support when it is needed. The many strategies used are proving to be effective, and teachers have a good understanding of how to ensure that all pupils make good progress.
- The governing body has undergone significant changes in the last few years. I considered how effectively governors undertake their responsibilities and hold school leaders to account. Governors know the school well due to their frequent visits to meet with staff and see different aspects of the school's work for themselves. They have worked effectively with school leaders and other staff to set clear priorities for improvement. They have made good use of high-quality

training from the local authority. They are ambitious for the school and have worked hard to ensure that they have the correct skills and knowledge to hold school leaders to account. This includes scrutinising the use of additional funding, including the pupil premium. They provide effective challenge and support, although they recognise that the documentation covering the governing body's work does not always provide a full record of all they do.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- review the cross-curricular projects so that there is sufficient challenge for the most able pupils to make rapid progress
- raise expectations for the standard of pupils' writing across the curriculum, so all work is as good as the best
- publish full details of the curriculum and fully record the work of governors.

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

Yours sincerely

Lucy English  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, other members of school staff and members of the governing body. I also held a telephone call with your leadership and learning partner from the local authority. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited all the classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with pupils and look in their books. We also met with all the teachers to scrutinise a sample of pupils' books. I spoke with pupils at morning break and at lunchtime. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 65 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 13 written contributions by parents. I spoke with staff and took account of 11 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I looked at a range of documentation including information about the work of governors, safeguarding and behaviour. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's tracking of pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.