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Mr James Howard
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Dear Mr Howard

Short inspection of Albury Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2018, 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In a period in which there have been several changes, including staffing changes, you have successfully preserved the caring, supportive ethos of this very small school, which is valued by pupils, parents and carers. One parent stated, 'Every child is valued and given the opportunity to flourish', while a pupil commented that school 'is like a big family'. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children were well looked after.

Inspection evidence confirms that Albury Church of England Primary School is one in which pupils' personal development and welfare are provided for well. You ensure that pupils of all ages behave exceptionally well and develop positive attitudes towards their learning. They take pride in their work and, as a result, the presentation of their work is of a very high standard. Pupils are highly supportive of each other and explained that everyone joins in and gets on well together. Parents agree, with one parent commenting the school has 'instilled an ethic of hard work, good behaviour and respect to others, that will reward you throughout life'.

Pupils have historically achieved well in reading, writing and mathematics. They enjoy a range of subjects, in particular art and science. Pupils have opportunities to work with specialist teachers who have developed their skills and enthusiasm for these subjects. Physical education (PE) is also very popular with many pupils. One parent commented, 'The school has made huge improvements in its sports offer

and this is adding a lot to children's confidence and experience in tournaments against other, bigger schools.'

You have developed a strong team who share your 'high expectations in everything we do' approach. Your leadership is complemented well by your deputy headteacher. Results from Ofsted's staff questionnaire confirm that staff all agree that the school is well led. They are proud to be members of staff and enjoy working there. You recognise the need to increase pupil numbers and have made some good additions to attract more families to the school such as hosting the weekly mother and toddler group, the additional provision for two-year-olds, the Nursery, and providing the breakfast and after-school clubs.

The school has recently joined a collaboration with another small local school. You have begun to make good use of the benefits this brings; for example, the teachers in early years have been able to share their good practice. This is supporting improvements in teaching and other provision in the early years, which was identified as an area for improvement in the previous inspection.

In collaboration with your leadership team and the governing body, you are addressing effectively the priorities identified in your school improvement plan. The previous inspection identified that work set was not always at the right level of difficulty for different groups of pupils, particularly in mathematics. You have tackled this through improvements to the teaching, learning and assessment of mathematics across the school. Pupils now have a greater range of resources to support their understanding of calculation methods. As a result, pupils' achievements in mathematics are improving, particularly for those working at greater depth.

You recognise that there are still areas which need to improve. For example, you acknowledge that more children in the early years should be reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception. You rightly identified that the teaching of phonics needed to improve to ensure that pupils make good progress in acquiring phonics skills to meet the expected standard. The changes you made have had an impact on improving pupils' progress in phonics. You also know that some pupils in key stages 1 and 2 could make even more progress, particularly in writing. You accepted my evidence that the school website was not compliant and agreed that it should be updated regularly.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that safeguarding is a priority of the school and all arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding undertake appropriate training. Weekly safeguarding staff meetings, which include the safeguarding governor, ensure that staff receive up-to-date information and regular training in safeguarding to enable them to follow the school's procedures. The school's records are detailed and maintained well. They show where there has been involvement of support agencies, with actions followed up in a timely way. Pupils told me that they always feel safe and happy in school.

They know that they have adults in school who will listen and help. Pupils can define bullying accurately and state that it does not happen in the school. E-safety is promoted well throughout the school, which ensures that pupils know how to stay safe online. Pupils explained to me that through lessons, specific activities, such as scooter training, and especially arranged talks on topics such as road safety, they understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- To confirm whether the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about children's achievements in early years. The number of children in the early years is very small. This can lead to large variations in published results from one year to the next. However, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has declined since 2015 and has been below average.
- Attainment on entry to the early years varies widely. However, most children's starting points are generally lower than is typical. You have developed effective tracking and monitoring systems, which has enabled you to develop provision that is engaging and well matched to individual pupils' needs. You have adapted your approach to the teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics. You have also reviewed the mathematics curriculum, with a focus on transition from early years to key stage 1, so that pupils are better prepared for Year 1.
- Improvements made to the early years environment have ensured that it is well organised, bright and stimulating. The two-year-olds, Nursery and Reception work well together, with the older children providing good role models for the younger children. As a result, all children are making good progress from their starting points. Parents are involved in their children's learning. However, the partnership between parents and school could be strengthened further, for example through effectively sharing information with each other.
- My second key line of enquiry was about pupils' achievement in phonics. Since 2014, the number of pupils who met the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was increasing steadily towards the national average. However, in 2017, there was a decline.
- You responded by reviewing how phonics is taught in the school. You made changes such as teaching pupils in smaller groups where well-trained, skilful adults check to see what pupils already know and what they need to learn next. Sessions are engaging due to the variety of activities. For example, during the inspection, children in early years were enjoying practising writing initial letter sounds on saucepans which were hanging up outside. Pupils are making good progress in their phonics from their starting points and apply their knowledge well when reading and writing.
- My third key line of enquiry was about pupils' achievements in key stages 1 and 2. In 2016, outcomes were above average in reading, writing and mathematics at expected and greater depth in both key stages 1 and 2. Progress in key stage 2 in reading and writing was strong. Due to the small numbers of pupils in each

year group, the published results can fluctuate year on year. Even so, in 2017, there was a decline in pupils' attainment in both key stages whereby some pupils could have made better progress from their starting points.

- You have put in place improvements to the teaching, learning and assessment of reading and writing across the school. The use of quality texts to enthuse pupils and logically sequenced, stimulating teaching ensure that pupils' key skills, knowledge and understanding are well developed. Teachers guide pupils well on how to improve their writing. You use assessment to correctly identify potential barriers to learning such as language development and have introduced a range of strategies to develop pupils' vocabulary and understanding of grammar.
- Staff support pupils' reading skills highly effectively. Pupils receive appropriate guidance, dependent on their current ability. Those who need specific, additional support receive swift and pertinent provision to help them catch up. Pupils enjoy reading and are knowledgeable about different genres and authors. One pupil commented, 'I love reading, it's my favourite thing, as it takes me to another world.' Your information about pupils' learning shows that pupils are making good progress although achievements in writing are not as strong as they are in reading.
- Finally, I evaluated how effectively leaders and governors carry out their statutory responsibilities, with particular regard to providing information. You rightly acknowledged that, at the start of the inspection, some information on the school website, although fairly new, was either missing or out of date. Some changes were made during the inspection. My meeting with governors confirmed that they know the school well and understand their legal responsibilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- information is effectively shared so that parents are fully involved in their children's learning in early years
- improvements continue in key stages 1 and 2 so that most pupils make accelerated progress from their different starting points, particularly in writing
- the school website is updated regularly to ensure that it meets statutory requirements.

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

Rachel Welch
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss progress since the previous inspection and to agree the key lines of enquiry. I also met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, the school council and a selection of pupils from other year groups. I spoke to a representative from the local authority. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the plans for improvement and assessment information for all year groups. I listened to pupils read in Year 2 and Year 6. I also examined the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information regarding attendance. We visited lessons and looked at books in all classes. I also looked at 24 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, seven staff and 22 pupil survey returns.