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Mrs Lorraine Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Smith

Short inspection of Pluckley Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2019, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are unwavering in your determination to ensure that pupils receive the best possible learning experiences. You and your deputy headteacher form a strong senior leadership team. The school is part of The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT). You work closely with trust members and governors. There is a clearly defined shared purpose, vision and ambition which guides and directs the team's work.

Until recently, the school was in a federation with another primary school and shared a governing body. When the federation ceased, a new governing body for the school was formed. Some of the governors were on the previous governing body and some are new. Governors work productively in partnership with TKAT's regional director to provide support and challenge and ensure that leaders are held to account effectively for the school's performance. The trust has provided bespoke training and effective support in securing improvement. The trust, governors and staff have every confidence in your leadership.

On your appointment, you quickly identified areas for improvement and took determined and decisive action to address them. Your actions have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils. In 2018, the proportion of pupils that achieved age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 was above the national average. The proportion that reached the higher standard was in line with the national average in

reading, above that in writing and below in mathematics. Progress was weakest in reading. Your current assessments and the work in pupils' books indicate that pupils make good progress overall, and an increasing proportion of pupils are achieving the expected and higher standards in all subjects.

You set great store in developing leaders and ensuring that they make a significant contribution to school improvement. You and your deputy and the trust members are outward looking and ensure that the latest educational research informs the strategies and approaches that you use in school. You have a sharp awareness of the school's strengths and areas for further development. Rigorous and accurate monitoring by leaders, governors and the trust identifies current priorities. You have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection.

Pupils enjoy their time in school. They are friendly, polite and enthusiastic about the school. They have good attitudes to learning. They say that teachers make learning fun and that they like work that challenges them and 'makes us really think'. There are good relationships between staff and pupils, and staff know all the pupils well. Pupils value the friendships they make at school. One parent summed up the views of several with the comment: 'My children are happy, engaged and excited about their learning. They are turning into well rounded, resilient, inquisitive individuals.'

The majority of parents are very positive about the school. Most agree that their children are happy at school, feel safe and are well looked after. Most are very supportive of the changes you have made. For example, one parent wrote: 'Since the new head arrived, there have been improvements including better communication and more opportunities to see the children's learning through termly learning afternoons and class assemblies.' A small minority of parents, however, have not been happy with change and expressed their concerns, particularly over the decision to split the Year 1 class and the communication at the time. I found that you, governors and the trust work hard to engage and work with your community, and that decisions are always made in the best interests of the pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' well-being and welfare are paramount. Pupils, staff and parents agree that the school keeps children safe. One parent wrote, 'Everyone knows everyone and my child feels extremely safe and secure there.' Pupils say that they feel well looked after and happy in school and that they are confident to turn to adults in school if they have any problems. The school's values, which encompass Christian values and fundamental British values, support pupils in promoting safeguarding through, for example, friendship, respect and cooperation.

Your deputy headteacher is the main designated safeguarding leader, and together you have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and efficiently maintained. Training for all staff is up to date and compliant with current requirements and guidance. Staff are vigilant. They know what to do to keep pupils safe and how to raise any concerns should they arise. Swift action is taken if

concerns are raised. Liaison with external agencies, if required, is good, and ensures that pupils receive timely and effective support.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to focus on some key aspects of the school's work. As well as inspecting safeguarding, I explored: pupils' progress in reading and phonics; how well the curriculum meets the needs of all groups; how well pupils are challenged in mathematics, especially in developing mathematical reasoning skills; and pupils' presentation, grammar and spelling skills.
- In 2018, the proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check was below the national average. The changes you made in the early years and key stage 1 enabled you to review the organisation of phonics teaching. As a result, a much higher proportion of the current Year 1 pupils are on track to achieve the expected standard. Teaching is accurate and skilled. Pupils make good progress and apply their skills well to help them read and write. You keep a close track on pupils in Year 2 to make sure that they are successful in catching up from the previous year. You are aware that there is scope for further challenge for the youngest children.
- Reading for pleasure is promoted well across the school. Pupils use their good reading skills to research and access the wider curriculum with confidence. Pupils enjoy good-quality, challenging and stimulating texts that help them develop empathy and opinions on wider social issues, as well as providing starting points for their learning in different subjects. Work in their books shows that their reading successfully influences the quality of their writing in a range of subjects. Your checks on pupils' progress demonstrate that progress in reading has strengthened this year.
- You have already clearly identified, as part of further school improvement, plans to develop the curriculum. There is a very clear, shared view of your intentions. Your commitment to this work is indicated by the development of a middle-leadership role to drive the changes. You have, rightly, acknowledged the need to enhance and enrich pupils' learning in the wider curriculum as well as in reading, writing and mathematics. All groups of pupils respond well to investigative and problem-solving activities. A parent acknowledged this, and wrote: 'I would love to see more focus on STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] subjects, the children were so enthusiastic at last term's science-themed learning afternoon, it would be great to capitalise on that and foster their love of science.'
- Currently, expectations are sometimes a little inconsistent across the school and work does not always deepen pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. The curriculum has not been developed fully enough to ensure the highest possible expectations for pupils' outcomes across the school.
- Knowledgeable and influential leadership in mathematics has ensured that successful actions have been taken to strengthen pupils' achievement in the subject. The positive impact from the actions that have been taken are evident. Pupils are increasingly adept and confident in using mathematical-reasoning skills

to explain their thinking and learning. Initiatives introduced are helping pupils remember what they have previously learned and know, and to make connections in their learning. The successful approaches are not yet fully embedded into key stage 1 to ensure that there are the highest expectations across the school.

- Pupils' books show that you have been successful in improving pupils' presentation of their work. Pupils take pride in their work and their achievements. They are using a broader range of punctuation to enhance their writing, and spelling is generally increasingly accurate. However, as with other improvements, the highest expectations for what pupils can achieve are not as yet fully embedded and consistently demanded across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum you are developing makes sufficient demands on pupils to challenge them in their learning in all subjects
- there are the highest possible expectations for pupils' achievement no matter what their ability or age.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Canterbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and your middle leaders. I met with the chair of the local governing body, and the regional director and deputy regional director of TKAT. You accompanied me on visits to classes. During these visits, I spoke to pupils about their learning, looked at their work and heard them read. I spoke to pupils around the school and in the playground, asking them for their views on the school. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records, including your school improvement plan, evaluation of the school's effectiveness, information about pupils' achievement, and documents relating to safeguarding. I took into account 39 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 26 free-text comments, and spoke to some parents at the start of the day. I also considered eight responses to Ofsted's staff survey.