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Mrs Amy Myers
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Myers

Short inspection of Hormead Church of England (VA) First School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 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 previous inspection. The school has experienced recent change with the previous headteacher leaving in December and you and the senior teacher taking up leadership positions at the beginning of January. This has been a smooth transition and you and the team have maintained the efficient running of the school. Leaders and governors are continuing the work to further improve the quality of education for pupils. You have been well supported at this time of change by partnerships with a local first school, the local authority and the diocese.

The governing body has demonstrated good strategic planning for the future as it endeavours to maintain a stable and sustained leadership team. Governors are passionate about ensuring that when a permanent appointment to the headteacher post is made it is the right one for the pupils in school. All the questionnaire responses from pupils, parents and staff received during the inspection show that without exception they would recommend this school to others, which demonstrates the high regard that they hold for the work of school leaders and governors.

Pupils speak knowledgeably about the school values of respect, kindness, cooperation, peace, honesty, aspire and love. These values underpin the curriculum and are exemplified by the behaviour of all who work and learn within the school. Typically, pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school. They demonstrate good attitudes to learning and try hard in lessons. Pupils behave very well and are polite and courteous to each other and adults.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the provision in the early years and also for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have been very effective in making these improvements and now these aspects are strengths of the work of the school. Children make a good start to their time in school and pupils with SEND are well cared for and provided for.

School leaders and teachers are continually looking at ways to improve the curriculum to make it more interesting and stimulating. There are still some aspects in need of improvement. For example, older pupils in the mixed-year classes in some lessons do not receive work that stretches them because it is not based closely enough on the gains in learning made the previous year when they were in the same class.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors have ensured that they meet their statutory requirements to keep pupils safe. All procedures to recruit staff safely are adhered to, and training of staff is recorded systematically to ensure that all are up to date.

Leaders have considered carefully safeguarding arrangements while interim leadership is in place to make sure that there is a well-trained safeguarding lead on the premises at all times throughout the school week.

Child protection arrangements are secure and records demonstrate that when necessary the school has worked effectively to keep vulnerable pupils safe. In all cases, a record of the action and support for vulnerable pupils is kept alongside the contact that has been made with partner agencies, such as social services. However, sometimes the way this is done differs between one case and another which can make it a little difficult for new leaders to understand quickly the history of a case. Leaders are currently making these records more streamlined and uniform so that they are easier to understand.

Inspection findings

- The new interim leadership team has quickly established a good working relationship with the staff in the school. Morale is high and staff work well together to ensure that the quality of education is being continually reviewed so that improvements can be made. One example of this is the coming review of the curriculum later this year. While the curriculum meets the requirements for the national curriculum and has many interesting and motivating features, such as the forest school that pupils are extremely enthusiastic about, leaders and teachers see that there are opportunities to make it more creative.
- One example of improvements to the curriculum made recently is the focus on writing. Across the school, pupils of all abilities are producing interesting writing, paying due regard to spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Since the previous inspection, it is noticeable that each year in reading, writing and mathematics the proportion of pupils that reach the expected standard is lower than it was when the children left the early years. Following an

investigation of this, part can be attributed to changes in the cohort. Of more significance, this year, leaders have improved the quality of teaching in key stage 1 considerably to ensure that this pattern of attainment is changing. Currently, teaching and assessment match work well to the needs of pupils in several subjects so that all groups of pupils are now making better progress than they were in the last few years.

- In mathematics, teachers have adopted a new scheme of work. This means that in the last few months they have increased the opportunity for pupils to carry out problem-solving and reasoning activities to apply the number skills that are being learned. Some pupils show that they still lack confidence when carrying out these activities because they have not done them regularly enough in the past. In addition, the activities planned tend to be added on after other work is completed rather than being central to the mathematics curriculum.
- At the previous inspection improvements to the provision and leadership of pupils with SEND were recommended. Most of these pupils are disadvantaged. The school has worked effectively with the support of an expert special educational needs leader to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met and that the barriers to their learning are overcome. In class, for example, in key stage 2, pupils gain excellent help from well-trained teaching assistants to make sure that there are high-quality learning opportunities.
- In the key stage 2 class, the most able pupils make good progress, particularly in Year 3. However, in some subjects, pupils of all abilities in Year 4 often do the same work as Year 3. This means that they repeat aspects learned previously, such as the recent work on paragraphs in writing. This means that pupils, especially the most able, are not making the gains in their learning that they could.
- Very effective leadership in the early years means that both Nursery and Reception children are making good progress in their development. This represents a marked improvement since the previous inspection. Assessments and observations of children are used effectively to plan activities and the next steps in learning. This helps to explain the higher than average proportion that achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils become more proficient at solving problems and applying their mathematics skills by embedding this aspect of learning at the heart of the mathematics curriculum
- older pupils in mixed-age classes receive work that builds on what they have learned in the previous year.

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

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I visited all classes to talk to pupils, observe teaching, learning, the behaviour of pupils and to examine the work in books. A range of school documents, including safeguarding records, assessment information and the school self-evaluation, were examined. Meetings were held with you, the interim senior teacher, the special educational needs coordinator, the early years leaders, the member of staff responsible for the administration of safeguarding records, some governors and two groups of pupils. I scrutinised the questionnaire responses from 19 parents, 10 staff and 18 pupils.