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Mrs Margery Slatter
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Slatter

Short inspection of Ewelme Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with the staff, you form a strong team and are united in your ambition for the school to provide the very best for pupils and their families. You know the school well and have a very good understanding of the school's many strengths and where you would like to make further improvements. Governors support the school well. They visit the school regularly and are kept very well informed of pupils' progress through your high-quality, detailed reports. You have ensured that pupils make good progress, achieve well and develop into confident, caring and responsible young people.

The school's strong Christian ethos and core values are woven like a golden thread throughout the work of the school. These values are reflected in pupils' exemplary behaviour and the way they demonstrate kindness, care and consideration for each other. Other values such as 'unity' are developed well through occasions for pupils to reflect, for example, on how they support each other in team events. The school is a happy and purposeful community where pupils thrive. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, and some describe the opportunity for their children to attend Ewelme as a 'privilege'. As one parent, commented, 'We are lucky to have such a wonderful school in our village.'

Pupils and their teachers get on very well together and pupils' well-being and care are at the heart of the school's work. Every pupil is valued and their achievements

celebrated. Pupils are proud of their school and appreciate and value the school's beautiful historic setting and medieval school buildings. They play an active role in the life of the village community and the church. For example, on the day of the inspection pupils enjoyed making cakes to sell at a community coffee morning. Children attend an assembly every week at the church and enjoy taking part in special Christian festivals such as Easter. You have also ensured that pupils develop an understanding of other faiths through their learning about different world religions. Equally, you have helped pupils to learn about other communities in the world, for example through the school's links and fundraising events for projects in Africa.

The rich and vibrant curriculum is a strength of the school. Opportunities abound for pupils to learn through many stimulating themes and topics. Pupils are regularly able to learn in very interesting ways such as well-designed practical activities, drama and role play. For example, when learning about the war, pupils became 'evacuees' for the day and when learning about the Romans they created their own aqueducts. Teachers also make good use of the school grounds, for example by inspiring pupils to write and creating works of art from natural objects. These kinds of activities make learning meaningful, interesting and memorable for pupils. As one pupil commented, 'It's the best school I've ever been to!'

When the school was last inspected in 2012, the inspector recognised the many strengths of the school, including pupils' good achievement, behaviour and the curriculum. The inspector also asked leaders to make further improvements to the school by ensuring that pupils' progress in writing matched their good progress in reading and mathematics, and that teaching in Year 1, especially phonics (letters and the sounds they represent), is pitched at the right level for all pupils.

You have maintained the many strengths identified in the last inspection and standards have continued to rise. In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standards was well above the national average. Pupils in key stage 1 made good progress and the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard was close to the national average in writing and mathematics. Achievement in reading was particularly strong and standards were well above the national average. Children in the early years continue to achieve well.

You have also successfully tackled the areas for improvement from the last inspection. The school's systematic approach to handwriting has ensured that pupils' handwriting is developed well. As a result, many pupils confidently use a mature joined-up style from an early age. Overall, progress in writing is good and pupils now have many opportunities to develop their writing skills across different subjects. However, while progress in writing overall is good, in some classes the most able pupils are not consistently challenged to achieve as well as they can. In addition, the quality of some pupils' writing is limited by inaccuracies in punctuation.

Good teaching in Year 1 enables pupils to make good progress and achieve well in

reading, writing, mathematics and phonics. In 2017, there was a slight dip in the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check. However, very small cohorts and pupils' varied starting points account for this. In other subjects, pupils make good progress, giving them a successful foundation on which to build in Year 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff know pupils as individuals and are, therefore, aware of any changes to their behaviour that may indicate a concern. Appropriate training ensures that staff are confident in knowing how to respond and refer any concerns to the headteacher. You have rightly identified the need to have a deputy designated lead for safeguarding, and have organised training for a senior teacher to enable them take on this responsibility. You have ensured that all the required checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are carried out diligently. Pupils feel safe and are happy at school. They are confident that they can speak to adults in school if they have any worries or concerns. Parents are also entirely confident that their children feel safe in school. As one parent commented, 'I have no concerns at all.'

On the rare occasion that you have had a concern about a pupil, you have taken appropriate action, contacted relevant outside agencies and kept clear records. However, you recognise that your records of minor welfare concerns are not as systematic as they could be to help you to keep a careful track of these over time. You acknowledge this and plan to strengthen record-keeping. Governors regularly check the school's safeguarding arrangements and keep all aspects of pupils' health and safety under review.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we agreed to focus on how well teaching and the curriculum are enabling all pupils, including boys and girls and the most able pupils, to achieve well in reading and writing. We also agreed to focus on the effectiveness of phonics teaching, teaching in the early years, and how well the needs of all pupils, including boys and girls, are met.
- The very rich, engaging curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their reading and writing skills in many subjects. Over time, pupils write at greater length, for many different purposes and in a wide range of contexts. For example, pupils produced some high-quality newspaper reports from their learning about the first landing on the moon. In religious education, pupils wrote prayers and reflected on the role of prayer in different religions and societies.
- Teachers apply their good subject knowledge to plan sequences of lessons that develop pupils' writing skills well. Teachers use prompt cards to help pupils check that they have included the right features in their writing. They plan interesting writing tasks such as creating 'just so' stories about rainforest animals which motivate pupils to write. However, in some classes writing tasks do not consistently challenge the most able writers to achieve as well as they can. In addition, some pupils do not consistently apply their punctuation skills in their

writing tasks and basic errors persist in their writing.

- Pupils read a very wide range of texts, both within their English lessons and across the curriculum. Teachers use their weekly guided reading sessions to develop pupils' comprehension skills well and extend pupils' vocabulary. This develops pupils' skills well and, as a result, all pupils, including the most able, achieve very highly in reading. In 2017, a much-higher-than-average proportion of pupils achieved the higher standards in key stages 1 and 2.
- Teaching caters well for both boys and girls and they make equally good progress in reading and writing. Teachers continually review the topics and texts that pupils study, to make sure these meet the needs and interests of boys and girls. Differences in the standards achieved by these groups of pupils are related to individual pupils' varied starting points and the very small numbers in each cohort.
- Good teaching of phonics enables pupils to achieve well. Over time, pupils develop their skills well, and apply their knowledge of letter sounds when reading. Following the previous inspection, leaders reviewed their approach to the teaching of phonics and pupils are now taught in smaller groups, based on their prior learning. These smaller groups mean that teachers can readily identify and address any gaps in pupils' learning and adjust their teaching to meet pupils' needs. The proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard at the end of Year 1 is broadly in line with the national average. By the end of Year 2, all pupils achieve the required standard.
- Children in the early years make good progress and achieve well. In 2017, the proportion of children who achieved the expected 'good level of development' was similar to the national average. However, a very high proportion of pupils exceeded the early learning goals in many areas of learning.
- Over the past few years there have been variations in standards, particularly between boys and girls. However, these variations are due to the very small cohorts and the proportion of pupils who start the early years with skills that are lower than typical for this age. All areas of learning are promoted well and good teaching ensures that children get off to a good start to school. Relationships are highly positive and the early years is a welcoming, nurturing environment where children feel happy and secure and learn well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- writing tasks more consistently challenge the most able pupils to enable them to develop their skills further and achieve highly
- teachers give greater attention to pupils' punctuation so that pupils apply their skills more consistently in their writing
- record-keeping is strengthened to ensure that any concerns about pupils' welfare are systematically logged.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with you, I visited all classes to look at learning and talk to pupils about their work. I met with you to discuss the school's self-evaluation, pupils' outcomes, plans for improvement and safeguarding arrangements. I met a group of teachers to discuss the progress pupils are making and to look at work in books. I met with a group of five governors and also held a telephone conversation with the local authority school improvement partner. I spoke to a number of pupils informally during breaktimes and I met with a group of pupils from Years 2 to 6. I reviewed a wide range of documents, including the school's pre-employment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children, other safeguarding information and other school policies and documents. I considered the views of parents through the 34 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the responses of staff from the 10 members of staff who completed the Ofsted staff questionnaire. I also met parents on the playground at the start of the school day.