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Mr L Henderson
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Dear Mr Henderson

Short inspection of Sonning Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 2016, 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 May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In the short time since you took up your post in January 2016, you have provided inspirational leadership to your staff. You are ambitious for the school and strive for excellence for all. High expectations are evident in your leadership. The staff are in no doubt about your desire to enable all pupils to excel. Your insightful initial analysis of the school identified key areas that had declined since the previous inspection. You have taken swift action to address these. For example, you quickly recognised that pupils' behaviour was not as good as it should be during playtimes, lunchtimes and when moving around the school. You devised suitable plans to implement important improvements. Staff have reviewed the behaviour policy, new equipment has been purchased for pupils to play with during break times and you have communicated your high expectations of the standards of pupils' behaviour with parents. Pupils are positive about these improvements and now enjoy using the new equipment and the variety of games they are able to play together in the playground. Behaviour at lunchtimes and around the school has improved. This has also had a positive impact on pupils' learning in lessons, particularly during the afternoons. Your monitoring of behaviour has shown a substantial reduction in incidents of poor behaviour since the start of the spring term.

Governors have a broad range of skills and expertise and demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the school. They were tenacious in the headteacher recruitment process and did not shy away from the challenge to make sure that the correct appointment was made, even though this took considerably longer than anticipated. A recent review of the committee structure has enabled governors with particular skills to be effectively deployed to monitor the work of the school in their areas of knowledge. Governors are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They know that although standards are above average overall, they are not as high as they should be.

Since the previous inspection there have been changes in leadership and, although there have been improvements in teaching and outcomes for pupils, you recognise that there is more to be done to fully address the issues from the previous inspection. The most-able pupils are provided with challenges which help them to do well. However, you know they could be making better progress, particularly in writing. Pupils are more actively engaged in contributing their ideas in lessons and support staff are deployed to introduce new work to pupils. However, this is not always as effective as it could be because some teaching assistants lack sufficient subject knowledge and do not have a clear understanding of what pupils are expected to learn. You have already taken steps to address this. Recent training to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers and teaching assistants to deliver high-quality systematic phonics (the sounds letters make) teaching is reaping the desired rewards. Plans are in place to provide further training for teaching assistants to develop their knowledge and skills to support pupils' learning in lessons.

You carried out a thorough evaluation of the work of the school when you took up your post. You have accurately identified the most important things the school needs to do to improve. You recognised that the monitoring of teaching and learning was not robust enough. You have put in place a new programme of monitoring activities to check on the quality of teaching and the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. You have taken effective steps to hold teachers more to account for the progress pupils make. Regular meetings with teachers to discuss the progress of pupils in their class are supporting your checks on evaluating the performance of teachers. Teachers are clear about their targets for improvement and what they are aiming to achieve. As one member of staff put it: 'We have a clear view of the areas we are working on to develop further and, with the headteachers' leadership, we are focussed on our next key priorities'.

The school improvement plan was devised by the interim headteacher and you have added further actions to be carried out this year. However, currently the plan is not linked closely enough to improving outcomes for pupils. You know that to enable school leaders and governors to check on the progress of the plan, they need to know the expected outcomes for all groups of pupils across the school and the progress they are expected to make throughout the year. This will enable them to measure the success of the plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

The lead child protection officer and her deputy have implemented a range of improvements in safeguarding arrangements since September 2015. The safeguarding policy has been reviewed and includes references to all the most up-to-date guidance on keeping children safe. Expectations are high. All staff are provided with regular training at an appropriate level and are expected to read and understand their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe from harm. Leaders and governors understand their new duties to prevent extremism and radicalisation.

Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe through a range of carefully planned activities. The personal, social, health and economic education unit 'Out and about' covers a range of safety issues such as personal safety, stranger danger, road and river safety and resolving conflict. Pupils learn about keeping safe when using the internet and have a good understanding about a range of bullying issues they may face and how to deal with them.

The school works well with other agencies to ensure the safety of the pupils in their care. All safeguarding documents and procedures are fit for purpose and successfully implemented.

Inspection findings

- You lead the school with drive and determination. You want the very best for all pupils. You have a clear vision for how this will be achieved and have ambitious plans for the school. Your calm, supportive approach has enabled you to share your aspirations with staff and governors effectively. There is a collective confidence in your leadership.
- Governors share your determination to improve the school. They are keen to ensure that the school maintains its strong Christian ethos and 'family feel'. They make regular visits to the school and check that the actions set out in the school improvement plan are being carried out effectively. Minutes of their meetings show they provide suitable challenge to school leaders.
- Pupils say they are happy at school and feel safe. They say that teachers help them to understand what they are learning and provide targets and next steps to guide them. They know that if they are struggling with their learning, an adult will help them.
- Although standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have been consistently above the national average over time, you recognise that not all pupils make the rapid progress they are capable of. This is because the curriculum does not always inspire and engage all groups of pupils well enough. Further challenge is required to ensure all pupils, including the disadvantaged, make rapid progress.

- You quickly identified that the behaviour of some pupils was not as good as it could be. You took swift action to improve this. Already there is clear evidence that behaviour has improved and pupils are more engaged in their learning in lessons.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 has been below the national average for the last three years. You have implemented a more systematic approach to the teaching of phonics and teachers are now carefully checking the progress pupils are making. Pupils in Year 1 are now making better progress in this aspect of their learning. As a result, a higher proportion of pupils are on track to achieve the expected standard in this year's screening test.
- Many pupils say that teachers provide interesting and fun activities which help them to learn. One pupil described this by saying 'I forget I am in school because lessons are so enjoyable'. Pupils learn about a range of different religions and cultures and say that they learn that every religion is important. One pupil described how inclusive and respectful her classmates were when she shared her own religious traditions with them. Pupils understand about democracy, but are less clear about the rule of law and what this means to them. They would benefit from more opportunities to socialise with other pupils of different socio-economic backgrounds and develop the skills to positively contribute to life in modern Britain.
- Governors have ensured that the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used to benefit these pupils. The progress of these pupils is being tracked, but the evaluation of the direct impact of this funding has not taken place. Evaluating the work of the school has not been carried out well enough in the past. It is vital that teachers, subject leaders, senior leaders and governors assess the effectiveness of their plans and strategies for improvement.
- Governors regularly check the progress the school is making towards achieving the priorities in the school improvement plan. However, currently the plan does not include information about the expected outcomes for pupils. It is therefore difficult to determine whether pupils are making enough progress or whether the plan is successful.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are sufficiently challenged in lessons to enable them to make rapid progress
- the curriculum inspires and engages pupils and prepares them well for life in modern Britain

- the evaluation of all aspects of the school's work is sharpened
- the school improvement plan is clearly linked to improving outcomes for pupils and includes milestones that can be measured over time.

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 Wokingham Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your English subject leader, your lead child protection officer, the deputy lead child protection officer, staff, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and two governors. I had telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and the diocesan advisor. I visited all classes and accompanied you on visits to seven lessons. I looked at work in pupils' books during these visits. I looked at the survey results from pupils, staff and 'Parent View' and considered the comments that had been placed on this website by parents. I evaluated the accuracy of your self-evaluation as well as a range of other documentation. I checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements.

