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Mrs Paula Robinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Robinson

Short inspection of Icklesham Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Leaders have proficiently dealt with the challenge of different combinations of mixed-aged classes. You, along with the senior team, have continued to provide strong leadership and clear guidance to staff. You have worked effectively together to assist teachers in developing their practice through the school's 'curious curriculum' and the mastery mathematics programme. Your close involvement with a local education alliance of schools has also been instrumental in raising standards to even higher levels in the school than in the past. You have been supported well by members of the governing body and the local authority.

Leaders have embedded their Christian values and ethos across the school. This is evident in the behaviour of the pupils and in the respect they demonstrate towards others. Pupils develop well, both academically and socially, in a safe, nurturing environment. Your vision of 'developing the whole child' is brought to life by the rich curriculum and the creativity and commitment of the staff. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning are a testimony to your success. In every class, there is an excited buzz of learning, accompanied by dedicated focus on the task in hand. Pupils talk about their enjoyment of a wide range of subjects. Parents agree and are overwhelmingly positive. This is evident in the many positive comments in Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Parents noted that: 'The passion, care, love and respect shown to the children makes for very happy children, and happy children learn and

grow and thrive,' and that 'Icklesham exceeds the targets it is set and sets the standards for other schools to follow.'

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and to accelerate pupils' progress. You have relentlessly focused on this. As a result, at the end of key stage 2 in 2018, pupils made progress that was at least in line with national averages in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress in writing was well above the national average.

Pupils have continued to attain well above national averages in these subjects at the expected standard. This has also been the outcome at the higher standard in recent years. However, in 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard in mathematics dropped below the national average. In anticipation of this outcome, you have changed the way that mathematics is taught to ensure that pupils have frequent opportunities to reason mathematically and to acquire deeper learning that sticks. Pupils say that they enjoy this new level of challenge in mathematics lessons. However, more work needs to be done to ensure consistency in the way that pupils experience opportunities to develop this deeper thinking.

Leaders have also changed the school's curriculum to inspire and enthuse pupils. The new curriculum has the full support of pupils, parents and staff. One parent wrote: 'The school has an incredibly creative way of capturing my children in their learning, and they are constantly excited by school life and want to independently enhance this learning at home.' However, the curriculum is in its early stages of development. Leaders and teachers are working together to ensure that it will provide full coverage of the requirements of the national curriculum across all subjects in your mixed-age class set-up.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff have received the required level of training and demonstrate an understanding of their responsibilities. Governors and leaders ensure that there are robust systems for recording all the safeguarding checks that are carried out.

Pupils feel safe at school. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and this helps to keep pupils safe. Pupils know how to stay safe online. Pupils have been taught about bullying and know that they should tell an adult if it happens to them or to someone else. Pupils say that bullying does not happen very often, and that staff sort things out quickly when it does. Pupils know that they have a trusted adult that they can go to for help. The school has an established system for pupils to record concerns of any kind. These are then followed up with the pupil and, if necessary, with parents.

The designated leader for safeguarding makes the welfare of pupils a top priority. She has a detailed understanding of pupils' vulnerabilities and ensures that these pupils and their families receive the support they require.

Attendance for all pupils continues to improve and remains above the national average. Persistent absence continues to fall and presently stands below the national average.

Inspection findings

- A key focus of this inspection was to confirm whether pupils, from different starting points, are making the best possible progress in mathematics. In 2018, overall, pupils at the end of key stage 2 made progress in line with the national average in mathematics from their starting points. However, pupils who had started the key stage at a higher level fell below the national average for progress from that starting point.
- Leaders introduced a mathematics mastery curriculum during 2018. All staff, including support staff, received training to introduce and develop deeper thinking in mathematics for all pupils. Your introduction of a 'marking break' over assembly and breaktime allows teachers to adjust lessons at a mid-point to provide consolidation for some pupils and to challenge others to move on. Pupils told me how much they enjoy this approach and feel that it really helps their understanding and learning and helps them to make progress. School assessment information shows that most pupils across the school are now making at least good progress in mathematics. However, pupils in the same year group, but in different classes, do not always experience the same opportunities to develop their higher levels of mathematical understanding.
- Your work to increase pupils' engagement in the curriculum has had a positive impact, especially on those at risk of disengaging. Your 'curious curriculum' encourages pupils to apply their writing skills across a range of subjects, challenging them to reach ever-increasing standards and expectations and to write with a purpose. Their expanding use of rich language is evident in their writing. Pupils are keen to write and were seen to be frantically working to record their imaginative thoughts and prose.
- Progress across all subjects is carefully monitored and celebrated through individual subject displays around the school. These displays chart the progress being made within each subject across the school. Displayed work is of a high standard, particularly in art and design. For instance, pupils' needlework recently won first prize at a local horticultural show.
- Mixed-age classes that sometimes change in structure provide significant challenge to your work to develop a new, bespoke curriculum. Leaders are working to ensure that the requirements of the national curriculum, to build up knowledge alongside skills, are planned for every pupil. Your leaders are rising to the challenge and are creating plans to address the requirements, while keeping the learning relevant and exciting.
- Governors are a committed and enthusiastic group. They come from a range of different backgrounds with the necessary skills to support and challenge leadership. Challenge is evident in the notes from meetings, and governors undertake regular training to help them to hold leaders fully to account. They follow up on challenges by visiting the school and reporting back to other

governors. They know the school well and understand how all funding is being used and the impact that it is having.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the mathematics mastery curriculum is developed further to ensure that it is suitable for mixed-age classes and that it consistently provides pupils in the same year groups the same opportunities
- work to develop the school's curriculum ensures that the acquisition of knowledge within each subject is carefully planned to build on prior learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Marcia Goodwin
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you joined me in observing learning in classes. We looked at the work of many pupils, and many more talked to me about their learning. I also met with a group of pupils representing each class.

Meetings were held with you, your deputy and senior teacher, and with the teachers. I met with members of the governing body and spoke with your school improvement partner by telephone.

I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own analysis of strengths and weaknesses, assessment information, staff recruitment checks and records related to safeguarding and attendance.

I considered the views of 30 parents who responded to Parent View, 12 members of staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the 29 pupils who completed the online pupils' questionnaire. I also received a letter from one parent.