

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



25 May 2017

Mrs Jackie Chalk
Headteacher
Seend Church of England VA Primary School
School Road
Seend
Melksham
Wiltshire
SN12 6NJ

Dear Mrs Chalk

Short inspection of Seend Church of England VA Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. For all who work or learn at your school, it is a harmonious place. Your positive attitude permeates through to all staff, who fully share in your vision of what effective education should be for the pupils you serve. A very strong sense of teamwork and collaboration exists because of the care you take to recruit the right staff and governors. All who I spoke with during the inspection used the terms 'trusting' and 'open' to describe your leadership. Most importantly, pupils emulate these qualities in the way they conduct themselves and act towards each other and adults.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. Your collective school culture enables all pupils to thrive in their personal development and make rapid academic progress in reading and mathematics. Pupils, parents and staff are overwhelmingly positive about the experiences the school provides, typically commenting on the 'special place' that is Seend School. All reported on the 'friendly, happy and caring' ethos that characterises your school. Pupils and parents are extremely happy because you take the time to discuss issues with them and ask them what you could do to make things better. The comment, 'Seend School is a good place to start dreaming about what you want to be when you're older', typifies how parents and pupils view your school.

You have improved pupils' attainment since the last inspection. The standards that pupils reach by the time they leave the school are now well above the national average. Pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is also significantly above average, although their progress in writing is not as rapid. Your school's high performance is recognised in the letters of congratulation received from government ministers regarding pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check and the national tests in Year 6.

The school is part of the Academy Trust of Melksham (ATOM). The trust was formed in April 2015 and is responsible for seven primary schools and one secondary school. Local governors are aware that, to date, trust leaders have prioritised their work supporting other schools within the trust. The trust has drawn on leaders at Seend to help strengthen the leadership at another trust school and to provide training for other schools to help develop the accuracy of teachers' assessments in the early years.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that policies and practice keep abreast of recent legislation and reflect good practice. Staff attend update training regularly so that they are vigilant and mindful of the potential dangers to pupils. Your ongoing commitment to ensuring pupils are kept safe is evident in the way you supported other trust schools to develop their safeguarding practices. You took the learning from that experience to further enhance the safeguarding practice, policy and procedures at Seend School. Although safeguarding arrangements were already effective, you felt there was even more room for improvement.

Your close links and proactive work with other professionals, such as social workers, ensure that referrals elicit appropriate support to improve children's well-being. You cultivate a very strong sense of belonging in the school community; this is evident in the records provided by the local authority and visiting professionals. Parents recognise you as someone who will always listen to their views and who is prepared to act to make a positive difference to their children's lives. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, believe their child to be safe at your school. That pupils understand the values of respect, tolerance and open acceptance is one of the cornerstones of your work. This prepares pupils well for life beyond the school gates and the village of Seend.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we explored whether the difference in the attainment in early years of boys when compared to girls is diminishing. We also looked at the progress boys are making in their writing. We investigated how well pupils are achieving in subjects beyond English and mathematics. Finally, we scrutinised the effectiveness of leaders' monitoring and evaluation and how the findings are used to bring about improvements.

- Your chosen approach to focus on practical activities is sparking pupils' enthusiasm for writing. When this is coupled with an emphasis on getting the technical aspects of composition correct, boys make swifter progress in their writing. This was seen, for example, in pupils' work to describe a rainforest when studying this topic in geography. Work in older boys' books shows that pupils routinely use fronted adverbials, expanded noun phrases and an extensive range of punctuation. Adults check that these features are included in pupils' writing across all subjects. Occasionally, this can be at the expense of checking pupils' understanding of the impact of word, sentence or vocabulary choices on the reader. Consequently, the progress boys are making in writing is not as rapid as in other subjects.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ensure boys understand grammar and punctuation conventions well. For example, in English, teachers know how pupils' report writing should progress in sequential steps as pupils become more skilled at this genre. Pupils' compositions have improved as a result of your chosen approach. Adults and pupils are able to identify clearly where they have made mistakes and how they have improved their work. However, at times teachers' expectations are not clear enough to ensure boys progress in writing as quickly as girls and other pupils nationally. Work in some boys' books illustrates good standards of writing, but their even better progress is hampered when they are not consistently challenged to refine, edit and improve their compositions.
- Overall, your increased emphasis on providing interesting activities to engage boys in developing their writing skills is working. Actions start in the early years, where a high level of construction and physical activities is helping to develop boys' gross and fine motor control skills. These activities are ensuring they get off to a good start in their early mark-making and letter formation. Competition and technology are also used well across the school to stimulate and motivate boys in their learning. Similarly, the outdoor environment is used effectively to provide a wealth of stimulating activities that support classroom teaching well.
- Records provided by the headteacher for trustees give a general overview of the school's performance. However, there is insufficient attention on closely monitoring pupils' gains in knowledge, skill or understanding as they move through the school. This limits trustees' ability to undertake penetrating analyses of the school's strengths and weaknesses and to establish whether the planned actions for improvement are having the desired impact. For example, trustees have not highlighted that while boys' progress in writing is above the national average, it is behind their progress in other subjects and that of girls.
- Leaders' and governors' monitoring and evaluation also lacks detailed analysis and rigorous follow-up. A broad range of monitoring information is gathered to guide developments. Monitoring records, such as those for lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work, provide feedback and some broad-brush areas for improvement but points are not systematically followed through. For example, the school development plan for the academic year 2013–14 identified boys' writing as an area for improvement. Boys' attainment in writing has improved, but their progress still remains below the standards they reach in reading and mathematics.

- Activities to stimulate boys' more rapid development during the early years are proving effective. Earlier identification is enabling you to intervene more quickly than in previous years. 'Boy-friendly' activities including 'Pirates, Gruffalo Seekers and Ninja Turtles' are enthusing boys. When topics are linked with simple writing activities, for example creating wanted posters for 'Pirate Jim', boys' development of their language, communication and listening skills is strong. As a result of your collective efforts, a higher than average proportion of boys are set to reach the standards expected by the end of Reception.
- Pupils achieve well across a broad range of subjects. Teaching challenges pupils at rapidly increasing levels of difficulty so that pupils move on quickly in their learning; little time is lost covering work or concepts they already understand. As a result, pupils show a good understanding of a range of complex issues. They have, through historical enquiry, acquired a good knowledge of Britain's contribution in shaping the world. Pupils are familiar with famous people in British history, such as Nelson, Churchill, Wellington and Shakespeare, along with their impact on the world. Pupils are familiar with major events, such as the break with Rome during Tudor times. They demonstrate a good command of human and physical features when studying Europe or North America in geography. Pupils enjoy the approach adopted to challenging their learning in daily lessons.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of monitoring and evaluation focuses more precisely on areas for improvement identified in the school development plan
- senior leaders use the findings of their monitoring to follow up and check exactly how well improvements are being secured
- progress in writing improves, by clarifying teachers' expectation for boys and improving their understanding of how word, sentence and punctuation choices have an impact on the reader.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and early years leader. Four members of the local governing body, including the chair, met me to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The views of a number of parents were gathered through their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Visits to classrooms were conducted jointly with you to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, to review the quality of pupils' work over time, and to listen and talk informally with them about their experiences of school. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance. A telephone conversation was held with the school improvement partner. A further telephone conversation was conducted with a representative from the Academy Trust of Melksham, the appropriate authority for the school.