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Mrs Julia Stokes
Headteacher
Semley Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Stokes

Short inspection of Semley Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018, 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 2014.

The school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Semley School is a nurturing school that has the very strong support of parents. They describe the school as being 'a friendly and well managed school where children are happy, well behaved and learn well in a safe and secure environment'. Staff morale is very high and teamwork is strong. Together, you, your staff and governors promote the school's values of 'respect, aspiration, adventure and wonder' to 'inspire pupils to make the most of life's opportunities'. You and your leadership team have firmly established a culture of high expectations and respect for all.

You, your leadership team and the governors know the school well and understand its strengths and what needs to improve. You are resolute in your determination to tackle underperformance and promote excellence for all. You check thoroughly that the actions you take are making a positive difference to the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. This approach, together with high-quality staff training, has secured rapid improvement in, for example, pupils' understanding in mathematics. The results can be seen in the progress they are making which has increased markedly over the last year. Parents and carers greatly appreciate the information that the school provides, including that related to mathematics teaching, as it helps them to support their children's learning at home.

Pupils enjoy their time at school. They feel listened to by staff and supported to do

their best. Pupils are keen to learn, and respond very positively to the help and guidance that staff give them. 'Lessons are fun' was the view expressed by many pupils. They also value highly the additional activities you offer, including visits, which help to deepen their learning.

At the time of your previous inspection, you were asked to improve the impact of middle leaders on school improvement. Since then, two middle leaders have successfully completed a nationally recognised qualification in middle leadership. They are now much better equipped to contribute to school improvement. Working closely with you, the leadership team has extended and tightened systems for checking the quality of the school's work. You have expanded the range of evidence collected and ensured that the judgements made are accurate and of a consistently high quality. These procedures have ensured that the drive to secure school improvement is effective. One of the consequences of this work has been to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. In turn, this is supporting pupils to make better progress and to achieve well.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and regular training ensures that staff are up to date with the most recent legislation. Staff are very clear about their responsibilities and understand what they should do if they have a concern about a pupil. Your vigilance and the positive relationship you have with parents ensure that the school is a safe and secure environment for pupils. Parents express their confidence in the school's ability to care for their children. Phrases such as 'safe and secure' and 'a nurturing environment' were used by many parents to convey their trust in the school.

You place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' independence and personal responsibility. These qualities help pupils to develop the skills they need to keep themselves safe, including when using modern technology. Pupils recall in detail the information and messages they have been given about how to look after themselves and each other. Pupils develop respectful and supportive relationships with each other and adults. They report that they feel safe at school and would trust an adult to give them guidance and support if they had a worry or concern. Pupils' very good behaviour, typically good attendance and very positive attitudes to school reflect the confidence they have that they are very well looked after at school.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors evaluated the impact of leaders' actions to make sure that more pupils in key stage 2 spell accurately and are challenged to make good progress in writing.
- You and your leadership team have ensured that staff are very clear about what pupils are expected to know, and be able to do, in each year group. Pupils are taught how to apply English grammar and punctuation appropriately in their writing, and to spell words accurately. Pupils are encouraged to practise their

spellings at home through 'fun' challenges, and to check their work for spelling errors at school. Teachers are vigilant in their identification of incorrect spellings in pupils' work. Pupils know, and respond positively to, the expectation that they are responsible initially for checking the quality of their writing. They work hard not to repeat their mistakes. Regular checking of pupils' progress indicates that their spelling accuracy is improving and that they are using a broader range of vocabulary to enrich the quality of their written work.

- Across the school, teachers have supported pupils to develop the resilience to write longer pieces of work. Providing a context for their writing through science and topic work successfully motivates pupils to write at length. A good example of this can be seen in the work completed by pupils in Years 4 and 5, who chose a famous Australian landmark, such as the Sydney Opera House, to research and write about. The resulting extended and informative pieces of work reflect pupils' keenness to produce quality written work that engages the reader.
- The consequence of the actions taken, including the increased level of challenge, is evident in the improving standard of pupils' written work through key stage 2. Pupils are making better progress this year, with more in each year group working at the higher standard than in previous years.
- When evaluating phonics, I focused on the impact of actions taken to increase the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics in Year 1. You have supported staff in the early years class and in key stage 1 with training that has enhanced their skills in planning, teaching and assessing phonics. This work continues but has already had a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- Children in the early years are getting off to a good start. They confidently apply what they have learned to spell words and are well prepared to move into Year 1. For example, having learned the sound 'ar', children were able to write 'bar' and 'car'. Year 1 and Year 2 pupils accurately identify words where the same letters such as 'ie' are pronounced differently, as in 'chief' and 'pie'. Pupils' confidence and accuracy in spelling are improving quickly. Assessment information indicates that more Year 1 pupils this year, compared to previous years, are already at the standard expected in learning phonics.
- Finally, I explored how leaders ensure that more pupils in key stage 1 make good progress in writing. Pupils enjoy writing pieces together and are supported to share ideas and improve their choice of vocabulary. For example, linked to their topic on 'Polar Regions', pupils in Year 2 created an accurate and engaging recount of Ernest Shackleton's trip to the Antarctic. Working in this way pupils are helped to understand how to construct different types of writing, how to check for errors and how to edit and improve it. Although there is more to do, the progress that pupils have made and the standard of their current written work are showing a marked improvement on previous years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the focus on improving the quality of pupils' writing, including the accuracy of

spelling, is sustained through the school so that more pupils achieve greater depth in their learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Alison Cogher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you and leaders responsible for English, mathematics and assessment. Together, we looked at information about pupils' progress and some pupils' written work. We looked at a range of school documents, including the school's improvement plan and those relating to safeguarding. I spoke to members of the governing body and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We made visits to each of the classes to observe and talk to pupils in their lessons. I also spoke to pupils at break and lunchtime. Parents' views were gathered through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and by speaking to them at the start of the school day. I also considered responses to the questionnaires completed by staff and pupils.