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Catherine Karunaratna  
Executive Headteacher  
The Downs Church of England Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Karunaratna

### **Short inspection of The Downs Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 October 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

You work seamlessly with the head of school. Together you have maintained the exemplary strengths found in the last inspection. Pupils are focused in lessons and ready to learn. Around the school, pupils are courteous and polite. Relationships between adults and pupils are warm and respectful. The most vulnerable families and pupils receive a very high level of support from your team of staff.

You and the senior team know the school very well. You look in detail at what you know about pupils' progress and ask highly pertinent questions of yourselves as leaders. Your relentless focus on improvement is raising standards across the school. For example, you took swift and effective action when, in 2015, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check was below the national average. As a result, in 2016 the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard increased significantly and was above the national average.

You are strongly committed to working with other schools. You play an active role in a number of partnerships, beyond your federation of schools. Leaders and teachers value the many opportunities to share ideas, learn from each other and look at pupils' work together to agree assessment judgments about pupils' learning.

Governors provide effective challenge and support. They have a clear understanding of their strategic role and the differences between your work and theirs. Governors use their time in school effectively to get first-hand information about the things you are improving in the school. Governors value your leadership, are proud of the school's achievements and are ambitious for the school to be even better.

At the last inspection, you were asked to raise standards in writing. You have been wholly successful. Over time, almost all key stage 2 pupils have made expected progress from their starting points, including the most able pupils. The proportions of pupils making more than expected progress have been above those found nationally for a sustained period. In 2016, almost all children were writing at the expected standard at the end of Year 6. Pupils with the lowest starting points, including those who were disadvantaged, made rapid progress. Pupils in key stage 2 do not make the same progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing and this is your current school priority.

Your plans for improvement are clear because you know what is working well in the school and where things can be even better. You also adapt your plans in response to changing needs within the school. For example, not enough children left the Reception Year reaching a good level of development in 2016. You instantly took effective action. You invested in additional training, reorganised staffing and as a result current children are making good progress from their starting points.

Attendance levels for all pupils are above those found nationally. However, too many disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not attend school often enough. You know this and are continuing to focus energy and resources on tackling the attendance of these groups. You are having a positive impact on those with the very lowest levels of attendance but there is more to do.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and the team of staff with safeguarding responsibilities have created a culture in the school where safeguarding pupils' well-being is paramount. Your determination to get the right outcomes for the most vulnerable families is unwavering. You are relentless in your referrals to other agencies and will not accept their first responses if you are not satisfied. You make highly effective use of early help. Your assessments are detailed and you take every possible action to ensure that pupils' levels of school absence are integral to any care plans.

New staff receive a thorough induction and therefore understand statutory guidance and school policies to keep pupils safe. Staff record concerns diligently because they are attuned to any possible welfare concern, including those relating to watching or playing games online that are not age appropriate. Leaders keep very comprehensive records of all concerns, track every decision they make and log all communication diligently.

## Inspection findings

- Pupils who did not achieve a good level of development at the end of the early years make good progress in key stage 1, from their lower starting points. Pupils develop their phonics knowledge well. As a result, they become confident to write unfamiliar words quickly. Planned learning takes account of different groups of pupils' starting points and this enables pupils not yet working at the standards expected of their age to make good progress.
- Current key stage 2 pupils are making good progress in mathematics, particularly the most able. Feedback to pupils, in accordance with the school's policy, is used effectively to highlight misconceptions and ensure that pupils understand well what is being taught. The most able pupils are encouraged to solve challenging mathematical problems and this develops their ability to explain their reasoning and logic.
- Leaders have clear plans to further improve progress in mathematics at key stage 2. You have recruited a new subject leader who brings good subject knowledge. Leaders have looked closely at mathematics teaching and learning across the school. You have already put a number of key initiatives in place, such as extra support in Year 3 and 4 and a whole-school project to link mathematics closely to the school's strengths in teaching English. It is too soon to see the impact of these endeavours.
- Standards in reading at the end of key stage 1 and 2 are above those found nationally because pupils make good progress, including the most able readers and those with the lowest starting points.
- Over time, the attendance for all pupils is better than national averages. However, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities come to school less often. You know this and are not complacent about the groups of pupils who have higher levels of absence.
- Your concerted and sustained actions are beginning to have an impact. For example, you have improved the attendance of current pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You work closely with parents and often with other agencies to bring about improvement. Some pupils have historically been in school for less than half the number of days expected. Their attendance is improving significantly but there is still more work to do.
- You are appropriately challenging and supportive to families who do not bring their children to school regularly. For example, you access early help support for the most vulnerable to ensure that families are able to get their children to school. You are also rigorous about term time holidays and all staff are alert to patterns of absence that need to be explored or questioned.
- Children make good progress in the early years with their personal, social and emotional development. Children, including those who started school with weaker communication skills, play very well together. Children work well with adults and on self-selected tasks. Children quickly develop the skills to take turns and cooperate. Adults create interesting and stimulating opportunities to write. For example, the children racing to see who could write numbers outside and then wash them away with water the quickest.

- You cater for the needs of the most vulnerable children and families exceptionally well. For example, your work with young carers has been accredited at the highest level. You provide invaluable support for these children that enhances their well-being and also equips them with key life skills such as first-aid.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance levels of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities improve further
- key stage 2 pupils make the same progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing from their key stage 1 starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Cole  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I worked with you and senior leaders to look closely at the:

- progress that pupils who did not reach the early learning goals make in key stage 1
- progress that key stage 2 pupils are making in mathematics from their key stage 1 starting points
- impact you have had on improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- personal, social and emotional development of children in the early years
- effectiveness of your safeguarding procedures and the culture of the school.

I met with you, senior leaders and governors to review your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I accompanied senior leaders to classrooms across the school. We evaluated a range of work in pupils' books. I looked at your attendance figures and case studies. I looked at 44 responses on Parent View, 45 staff surveys and 121 pupil questionnaires. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements, including those related to recruitment.