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Miss Anna Cook
Headteacher
St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School
Chapel Lawn Road
Bucknell
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Dear Miss Cook

Short inspection of St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School Bucknell

Following my visit to the school on 10 February 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 2010.

This school continues to be good.

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

This is a very small and welcoming church school, where the warm family atmosphere enables staff to know every pupil on an individual level. You and your staff are committed to further developing the education provided for all pupils. Leaders make constant improvements to move the school forward, with a highly engaging curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils. Aspects of the provision are outstanding, such as the breadth of the curriculum and pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour. A parent summed up what this school offers and their feelings when they wrote, 'I wish I had been taught at St Mary's. A highly creative school, which believes in learning by "doing" and experiencing, ensuring memorable learning in the primary years'.

The culture of this school is one of continuous improvement to provide a rich education in a rural setting. Leaders have continued to improve teaching, the curriculum and the physical environment of the school since the previous inspection. As a result of consistently good teaching, pupils' outcomes at the expected level have been in line with or above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 for the last four years. The very small number of disadvantaged pupils progress at least in line with other pupils both in the school and nationally. Pupils receive an education that is consistently good at this school. Pupils happily learn and are rightly proud of their school. The exciting

and varied curriculum enables pupils to enjoy a wide range of activities, trips and visitors to the school. Leaders have ensured that the pupils receive high-quality teaching across the curriculum. Specialist science, sports, music and modern foreign language teachers are used to provide pupils with teaching which is at least good across the curriculum. The range of extra-curricular clubs is very broad, varied and warmly appreciated by pupils and parents.

Leaders have made improvements to the early years provision by building a dedicated teaching and learning space for Reception children. The new room is an extension of the Key Stage 1 classroom, allowing Reception children to access parts of Year 1 and Year 2 lessons and continue learning in their own space.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding in the school is very robust. All checks on staff, volunteers, governors and visitors are very thorough. Staff training is up to date and includes preventing extremism and radicalisation in education. The pupils I spoke to unanimously said that they feel safe because adults are always there to help. The comprehensive information booklet given to visitors on arrival was co-designed with pupils and contains useful safeguarding, school organisation, and health and safety details. Staff appropriately report any rare concerns that arise. Leaders and governors have ensured that the systems in place to keep pupils safe are very effective and the school has recently had its Safer Schools accreditation renewed.

Pupils are very respectful of each other and of all members of staff. Pupils say there is no bullying and any rare disagreements are quickly resolved. Pupils' behaviour and conduct are outstanding at all times of the day.

Inspection findings

- You and the governing body have ensured that the educational provision at the school has continued to develop and that the areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been successfully addressed. The school's local, national and global links are now extensive. Leaders work very closely with the community and local church to ensure that pupils have a well-developed sense of their locality. Productive links have also been made with local primary schools, creating combined sports teams and sharing staff training. The most-able pupils have additional mathematics lessons at a nearby secondary school, and secondary school staff are used to provide specialist teaching at St Mary's School. Leaders have developed links with schools in Germany, Russia and Uganda, helping to further develop pupils' understanding about the world. Teachers have created links with Southampton University, enabling the older pupils to have a Skype conversation with a professor of astrophysics regarding the solar system. Pupils' workbooks show that they now have a deep understanding of local, national and international matters, developed through a rich and well-designed curriculum.

- Children's independent learning skills and progress have been developed in the Reception Year as a result of improved teaching and providing a new dedicated teaching space. The Reception room is well designed and resourced, so that it helps to develop children's imagination. The early years provision has also been developed by staff training and an improved approach. The Key Stage 1 and Reception class teacher divides her time well between the different groups of pupils. Effective systems are in place to ensure that when the class teacher is working with other groups, the Reception children are well supported by a teaching assistant. Improvements have also been made outside, where a section of the playground is now dedicated to the Key Stage 1 and Reception children, with direct access from their classroom. Children's needs are successfully met, resulting in all Reception children over the last two years achieving a good level of development and being very well prepared for Year 1.
- At the previous inspection, it was recommended that the school should improve pupils' attainment in mathematics, particularly for the most able. This has been successfully achieved in Key Stage 2, as the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels at the end of Year 6 has been above the national average for the past three years. Employing an additional teacher in Key Stage 2 has helped to improve the teaching of mathematics. The upper and lower Key Stage 2 pupils are taught mathematics separately, enabling their skills to be further developed and the most-able pupils to progress further. Although most pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1, teaching does not yet enable the most-able pupils to make the progress they are capable of by the end of Year 2. This is especially the case in mathematics and writing. Leaders are aware of this and have appropriate plans to further accelerate progress in Key Stage 1.
- Governors have supported school improvements such as employing additional teachers and agreeing funding to create the new Reception teaching space. Governors support and work well with you to further improve the education provided at the school. They are experienced and skilled, and they visit the school regularly to talk to pupils about their learning and monitor the progress of the actions to further improve the school. However, there is room for governors to hold leaders more rigorously to account for their responsibilities, such as ensuring that the most-able pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

- Pupils were observed engaging in purposeful learning activities across the school during the inspection. Reception children were learning about the role of a travel agent. Activities included writing holiday booking forms and carefully considering all of the aspects of booking a holiday. This activity was well supported by a teaching assistant. Year 1 and Year 2 pupils were split into groups, learning about timetables and telling the time using clocks. Year 3 and Year 4 pupils were tackling two-step word problems using addition and subtraction. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils were using a range of skills to calculate the cost of multiples of pancakes, using known facts to price the various ingredients. Pupils were seen progressing in all year groups, although some pupils would have benefited from targeted support to progress more quickly.
- Pupils' workbooks show effective progress in reading, writing and mathematics. From pupils' starting points, progress is typically good rather than accelerated. This is supported by inspection evidence and the school's current assessment information. Work is well presented and pupils' workbooks demonstrate that the school's marking and feedback policy is followed. Due to the very small numbers of pupils in each year group, the school takes a highly individualised approach and is able to demonstrate that most pupils have made good progress by the time they leave the school. Training, new teaching appointments and external consultants have been used successfully to further develop the quality of teaching and improve pupils' progress.
- Pupils achieve well and some achieve above their age-related expectations by the time they leave the school in Year 6. Meaningful comparisons with national averages are limited due to the very small number of pupils in each year group. However, patterns over time show that pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 2 are consistently in line with or above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the expected level. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils who have achieved the higher level at the end of Year 2 is below the national average. Only a small proportion of pupils have achieved the higher level in reading and none in writing and mathematics over the last three years. Therefore, teaching needs to be further improved to enable the most-able pupils to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and extremely positive about the education their children receive. The open, family approach at the school means that parents have any rare concerns quickly resolved. Parents are kept well informed about their child's education through information sessions and regular newsletters. Some parents choose to drive their children some distance to this school because of the positive reputation it has and the education it provides. One parent rightly said, 'the school has a wonderful atmosphere that you can almost feel when you take your children in'.
- Pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average for primary schools. Staff work closely with the families of individual pupils who have lower attendance. You have had particular success with improving the attendance of individuals and engaging families in the school's work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teaching further improves to enable more pupils to make the progress they are capable of and to achieve above age-related expectations, especially by the end of Year 2
- governors provide further support and challenge to the leaders, enabling leaders to further improve the provision for the most-able pupils in particular.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Shropshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Bellworthy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors. I observed teaching in both classes, including the provision in early years. I spoke to a representative from the local authority. I looked at pupils' workbooks from across the school in a range of subjects to establish the progress and quality of pupils' work over time. Informal discussions were held with parents to gauge their views on the school, and 22 recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including any free-text comments, were considered. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes were observed around the school and at playtime. A wide range of documentation was also scrutinised, including the school's plans for improvement, external monitoring reports, records relating to attendance and safeguarding, records of checks made by leaders, and information on pupils' current progress and most recent outcomes.