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Mrs M Davies-McKeon  
Headteacher  
Barley Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School  
Church End  
Barley  
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Hertfordshire  
SG8 8JW

Dear Mrs Davies-McKeon

### **Short inspection of Barley Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 March 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 share and promote the conviction that your school should combine the caring family feel of a small village school with the broader experiences of a significantly larger one. In this you are being successful. Parents are extremely supportive of the school. They informed me that they appreciate the culture of respect and the 'wonderful caring environment' in which their children learn.

Since the last inspection, you have overseen significant changes in leadership that have improved the quality education provided by your school. For example, you are proud of the developing collaboration with Barkway First School. Pupils told me that they enjoy the fact that they have 'more learners to work with'. This was clearly seen as Key Stage 2 pupils from each school supported each other when using computers to improve their geometry skills. Similarly, adults are benefiting from sharing good practice with colleagues at Barkway, and developing their leadership skills. This has resulted in high staff morale and real enthusiasm on the part of teachers, all of whom have a leadership role, to improve the areas that you have correctly identified need to be better.

Your aim is to make school a 'happy place, where children feel motivated and enthusiastic about learning'. The evidence seen on inspection demonstrates that that this is being achieved. Relationships are strong at Barley Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School. Adults model the behaviour that they expect of pupils. In turn, pupils respond well to the high expectations placed on them and are happy in their learning and play. They mix exceptionally well together at lunch and break times. Pupils are inquisitive and polite when speaking with adults, often keen to talk about their learning.

Pupils enjoy lessons and approach their work with enthusiasm and good humour. One pupil explained that teachers 'help us enjoy our learning'. His peers agreed. Teachers' well thought out learning activities encourage pupils to be imaginative in their work. In this, Key Stage 1 leads the way. Pupils plan their writing carefully and then take time to edit and improve their initial ideas. Their successes are celebrated and mistakes are learned from with equal enthusiasm. As a consequence, pupils are increasingly confident in their learning and are making good or better progress.

You and your leaders have carefully planned a curriculum that enables you to achieve your aim of igniting the creativity within each individual child. Topics such as 'celebration' and 'famous people' enable pupils to draw together skills and knowledge from several subjects. This can be seen in the work on Florence Nightingale where pupils combine skills of English, history and art to describe her impact on nursing practice. Pupils' writing in this topic is of a similarly high standard as it is in their English lessons.

Pupils speak enthusiastically about the wider opportunities that you work hard to provide for them: for example, visits to local businesses, the developing link with a large primary school in London, and clubs such as art and gymnastics. Pupils are proud of their role in the 'Youth makes music' concerts in Cambridge. Similarly, they enjoy the opportunities to take part in village events, such as the church services. As a result, pupils are rapidly developing a broader knowledge of life within their community.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Under the skilful guidance of a knowledgeable safeguarding governor, the governing body is careful to ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory requirements. The single central record is well maintained and regularly checked. Staff receive appropriate training. They are aware of their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe, and know the processes to follow if they were to have any concerns. Pupils feel safe and know how to stay safe in a variety of settings. They could explain what they would do to stay safe online and why they needed to do this. Pupils follow the school rules about walking sensibly around the secure school site, and this enhances the sense of calm and safety.

## Inspection findings

- Governance is a strength. The governing body provides very effective support and challenge for senior leaders. Governors are careful to check that the information leaders provide them with is accurate. For example, many governors take part in the 'governor monitoring days'. They also receive presentations from school staff. Using the information they gather from these activities, governors are able to ask pertinent questions about the quality of education provided by the school.
- Leaders, including governors, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of development. Your self-evaluation has been used effectively to identify the correct priorities and the resources needed to make sure that the school continues to improve. You acknowledge that even more careful analysis of the impact of each activity would accelerate the pace of improvement further.
- You have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You have created a clear expectation that the 'needs of every child are recognised'. Teachers work successfully to ensure that this is the case. For example, teachers in early years carefully observe and record children's learning. They then make use of this information to plan learning activities that are closely matched to the individual needs of each child. You have also taken effective action to improve the quality of pupils' handwriting across each key stage. Adults follow the school's feedback policy carefully, but the quality of this feedback is variable, with some comments that are too vague to be helpful to pupils.
- Although the very small numbers of children in each early years class make analysis of any one set of results unreliable, over time there has been a rise in the proportions of children achieving a good level of development. This is due to the appropriate changes made by the early years leader. The children currently in school are making good progress from their individual starting points. Similarly, the percentage of Year 1 pupils who met the expected standards in phonics has remained high.
- Evidence seen on inspection indicates that pupils in Key Stage 1 are making strong progress across a range of subjects. This is due to the very effective teaching practice and excellent work of the teaching assistants. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 make good progress across a range of subjects. However, you are aware that they are capable of even higher standards and recognise this as an area for development.

- Leaders are making effective use of the benefits that collaboration with Barkway First School brings. Governors are committed to taking every opportunity to develop the skills of adults in school. Teachers are very positive about the carefully chosen training which is helping to improve the quality of leadership and teaching. As a result of the collaboration's 'Curriculum development day', teachers have been able to share the strongest practice in the teaching of mathematics and English. As a consequence, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve.
- You ensure that pupils are very well cared for. Adults wholeheartedly make use of their time to provide effective learning opportunities at all times of day. For example, at lunchtime, children in Nursery were excited to show the adult supervising them the snails that they had found. The adult immediately took this opportunity to ask the children to use their numeracy skills to establish how many snails there were. The children were delighted when they got this correct.
- You have worked effectively to improve attendance. Absence rose last year and you have tackled this robustly. You have worked with pupils and parents to emphasise the importance of children attending school regularly. As a result, attendance has improved markedly this year.
- Parents are very supportive of the school. All those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children are safe, happy, well taught and making progress. They rightly believe that the school is well led and managed. All would recommend the school to another parent. Parents told me that they appreciate how approachable teachers and leaders are. They also value the care and attention given to the individual needs of their children.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders analyse and explain the impact of their work more clearly and use this information to accelerate even further the improvements that are taking place
- teachers provide precise feedback that enables pupils to improve their work and make even better progress.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lucas  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you, your senior leaders, three middle leaders, seven governors and a group of 14 pupils. I also held a telephone conversation with your school improvement partner. Together, we observed pupils at work in a range of lessons. We carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and learning journals. I reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to governance, safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, and school self-evaluation and planning. I considered 15 responses from parents on Parent View. I also spoke with 13 parents and carers and took account of the views expressed in one letter that I received on the day of inspection.