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Mr David Boucher
Headteacher
Brixworth Church of England VC Primary School
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Dear Mr Boucher

Short inspection of Brixworth Church of England VC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous section 5 inspection.

Since the last inspection, you have restructured leadership roles and responsibilities in order to achieve a greater clarity of purpose and sense of a team. You are proud of the collective drive of your leaders, who share the same aspirational values for your school and pupils. Your style of leadership, rooted in high standards of courtesy, consideration and respect for others, is reflected in the senior leadership team being referred to as the 'LAMP team'. This stands for 'leaders and managers of people'. Staff and pupils share these high standards of courtesy and mutual respect. You were very keen that I should meet as many of your leaders as possible. You were rightly confident that they could talk to me fully and accurately about the strengths of the school and the areas that you all continue to work to improve.

Overall, pupils make good progress at Brixworth Primary School. You are aware of where further improvements are needed, recognising that not all pupils make the progress of which they are capable. In particular, pupils' writing needs to improve across the school. Leaders have addressed this urgently. They have introduced a range of well-considered initiatives to raise the profile of the importance of high-quality writing so that, as one leader put it, 'pupils develop a passion for writing'. You also acknowledge that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils needs to improve, especially at key stage 1. Teachers are increasingly alert to the specific

needs of individual pupils to help them catch up with others. You are also taking more time to identify the most effective interventions and have invested wisely in the appointment, training and development of teaching assistants who provide valuable support in and out of the classroom.

Pupils are very enthusiastic when they talk about the school. They have a strong sense of fairness, and are very kind and mindful of the importance of looking after others. Pupils told me proudly about the recent introduction of 'playtime pals', where pupils who have received appropriate guidance and training take it in turns to be on duty in the playground. This idea was suggested and organised by the school council because, as one pupil said, 'it isn't very nice if someone doesn't have anyone to play with'. 'Buddy benches' are provided so that 'playtime pals' can find someone who would like some company at breaktimes.

Pupils are able to articulate well what they are learning. One pupil explained ably the work she was doing in a literacy lesson, presenting a balanced argument about making donations to Sport Relief. Another described very precisely how he had improved his handwriting because of the help he had received from his teacher. It was striking how often pupils in all year groups told me how they would 'keep on trying' if they found something difficult. Perseverance to improve their work has become routine for them because of the helpful written feedback they receive. As one pupil stated, reflecting the views of others, 'teachers stretch you to your max – it's really good'.

You have improved levels of communication with parents since the last inspection. You provide an impressively detailed, colourful and interesting weekly newsletter, 'Primary word'. This ensures that parents receive helpful information about pupils' activities and achievements. Team leaders of each key stage go to great efforts to ensure parents know about the curriculum and how different subjects are taught. This starts from the earliest opportunity and helps parents to support their child's learning at home. In the early years, the children take home cards in the shape of different letters with guidelines for parents to help their child write letters, and use phonics to pronounce them in the correct way. Early years teachers and parents keep in regular touch using notebooks that go between school and home, with helpful information and answers to parents' queries.

You described to me the rolling programme of your school improvement plan, which is just coming to the end of a three-year cycle. Your keenness to involve all stakeholders in the life and aims of the school is reflected in your consultation with pupils, parents, staff and governors in identifying the priorities for the school.

The governing body supports you well. Governors are able to draw on their professional backgrounds to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. They are well prepared for meetings. They are aware of the importance of not being solely reliant on you for information and guidance. They make use of external training and carry out research independently so that they can ask you and other leaders the right questions, for example, about pupils' progress and the use of pupil premium funding. Governors know the priorities for the school. They told me how they keep 'a keen eye' on the impact of the measures taken by the school to improve pupils'

writing. Their visits to the school are increasingly geared towards the key areas of the school improvement plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

The single central record of recruitment checks meets current statutory requirements. You have well-organised systems in place to ensure that pupils feel safe and are kept safe. You and another leader have attended training so that you are aware of your responsibilities and have recently revised your safeguarding policy to ensure it is up to date.

Pupils state that bullying and name-calling are very rare. Pupils know whom they can talk to if they have any concerns and are confident that any worries are resolved promptly.

Pupils are polite and respectful towards each other and adults in the school. They are very familiar with the behaviour policy and are clear that it works well. Some younger pupils who spoke to me felt that their learning was sometimes interrupted by others chatting. Older pupils were adamant that this was very unusual in their classes, because they had a better understanding of how important it was to concentrate in their lessons. All pupils agreed that teachers are very quick to pick up on pupils 'being naughty' and that the use of consequences, such as the loss of 'golden time', is very successful to ensure that poor behaviour did not continue.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders, including governors, have an accurate view of the strengths and areas to be improved across the school. The headteacher and governors make sure that all staff are clear on the priorities for the school, which are reflected in everyone's performance management targets.
- By the end of key stage 2, more pupils than average make expected progress, with disadvantaged pupils making progress at similar rates to other pupils in the school, though fewer disadvantaged pupils make accelerated progress.
- While attendance is above national figures, senior leaders identify promptly when gaps persist in attendance between groups of pupils and others and tackle these appropriately. A member of staff is dedicated to provide family support. She maintains a vigilant overview of attendance and persistent contact with families. As a result of this careful identification and intervention, individual pupils have significantly improved their attendance.
- The inclusion manager carries out very detailed and regular tracking of the support individual pupils receive and whether it is making a difference. Senior leaders hold teachers to account if pupils are not making the progress expected of them. They identify whether the extra help pupils receive meets their needs or whether it should be changed. The school's current achievement information indicates that this meticulous approach is beginning to make a difference. For example, gaps are reducing in achievement between pupils with special educational needs or disability and other pupils, and in key stage 1 between disadvantaged pupils and others.

- Teaching assistants and teachers communicate with each other effectively. When pupils complete work individually or in small groups outside class, teaching assistants make close links with the work being covered in lessons, sometimes completing intervention work in the same exercise books as classwork. This means that pupils are able to draw on the extra support they receive very helpfully when they return to class.
- Teaching assistants receive specialist training so that they are well placed to support the specific and sometimes complex needs of individual pupils, and pass on their expertise to other members of staff.
- Team leaders have worked closely together to identify an agreed scheme and the strategies needed to improve the quality of pupils' writing. The newly formed writing project team, with representatives from each key stage, meets regularly to review the effectiveness of the delivery of the new scheme and share good practice. This leads to greater consistency in teachers' expectations within and between year groups, as well as appropriate adjustments in how the scheme is delivered, as needed. Pupils have more opportunities to complete extended writing in different subjects. High-quality writing is regularly displayed and celebrated, for example on the 'dragon wall' during the week of World Book Day.
- Leaders have given careful thought to the importance of feedback in helping pupils to improve their work. New policies are working well. Pupils can describe ways in which their writing has improved as a result of the feedback they receive from their teachers. Pupils are adept at reflecting on their work, finding for themselves ways in which they can do better, and are confident that their teachers will help them if they make mistakes or get stuck.
- Pupils have very positive views about the school. They appreciate how friendly it is and that teachers make learning fun and encourage them with praise. They are respectful of their teachers' expectations. Pupils notice improvements in behaviour and attitudes to learning in their lessons because teachers adhere to the behaviour policy fairly and instil in pupils the importance of not wasting time for learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to implement strategies to improve the quality of writing so that all pupils make good or better progress in writing
- close the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others and between those with special educational needs or disability and others.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you on regular occasions throughout the inspection. I held meetings with members of the governing body, the deputy headteacher and the teaching assistant with responsibility for family liaison, and pupils from every year group. I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I reviewed the single central record in a meeting with you and the school business manager. I looked at and evaluated a range of documentation, including anonymised performance management records, the school's self-review document and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I also scrutinised the school's achievement information and the results of surveys carried out for the inspection completed by parents, staff and pupils. I toured the school and visited all classes, accompanied by team leaders, and held informal conversations with pupils and staff.