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Mrs Janet Webborn
Headteacher
Brindle St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Webborn

Short inspection of Brindle St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 February 2017, 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your clear leadership, supported by the close-knit staff and well-informed governors, has ensured that the school has not stood still during the last four years. Indeed, you are ambitious for the school to become outstanding and aspects of the school's work are heading that way.

You have tackled robustly the areas for improvement set in 2012, leading to higher achievement for the most able pupils in key stage 1, improved quality of handwriting across the school, and an established role of subject leadership. Although improved, you have identified that writing remains an area for further development. I saw some good examples of pupils' writing in English and religious education books but more limited opportunities for developing writing in topic work and science.

Leaders have used their knowledge of the school's work to drive improvement in other areas, such as ensuring that the curriculum is as 'friendly' for boys as it is for girls, helping to close the gap between boys' and girls' achievement. More recently, leaders realised that the topic approach is not ensuring full coverage of the science curriculum and have introduced extra science teaching to plug the gaps. They recognise that a similar analysis could prove useful for other subjects.

In this small school, pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes. During the

inspection, I was struck by pupils' mature attitudes in class and around the school, and how friendly and caring of each other they are. Key stage 2 pupils with whom I spoke were knowledgeable about Christian and British values, such as humility, tolerance and respect. I was impressed by their understanding of the importance of these values in their own lives as well as in the very different lives that other people live.

Pupils' behaviour during the inspection was excellent. All pupils, even the youngest children, concentrated hard on their learning and spoke enthusiastically to me about it. They listen attentively to staff and to each other, and are willing to play an active part in lessons when given the opportunity. You and your staff have created a culture of happy industry in each of the three classes.

The school has a good track record of attainment that is above average at the ends of Years 2 and 6. Pupils' progress accelerates during key stage 2. In 2016, Year 6 pupils made above-average progress in reading and writing and very strong progress in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility is well established and taken very seriously. The school's safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited, and on temporary staff and trainee teachers on placement. Checks are also made on those volunteers who will visit the school regularly. Staff and governors are trained in child protection. They ensure that pupils are taught how to keep safe, including when they are online. Staff have completed recent training on 'sexting'. The training on the 'Prevent' duty is helping to ensure that the school community is alert to the potential dangers of extremism. Everyone understands the steps to be taken in the event of any concerns being raised.

All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that the school is a safe place to be. So did the pupils with whom I spoke and nearly all the parents and pupils who completed the online questionnaires, in which all the pupils stated that they had someone at school they could talk to if they were worried about something. Evidence gathered during the inspection did not give any cause for concern for pupils' safety.

Inspection findings

- While the overall picture from the results of national Year 2 assessments in 2016 was positive, the pupils who had exceeded the early learning goals at age five had made much stronger progress during key stage 1 than those who met or were working towards them. Almost all Reception children achieve consistently well in the prime areas of communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. The school should redouble its efforts to support children's development in reading, writing and mathematics to ensure that Reception children reach or exceed a good level of development,

thereby equipping them to get off to a flying start in key stage 1.

- Progress of pupils currently in key stage 1 has been affected by unavoidable changes in staffing with temporary teachers taking on the challenge of planning and teaching Reception and Years 1 and 2 in the same mixed-age class. The impact on progress for Year 2 pupils is most marked in mathematics where the curriculum has lacked breadth with some topics repeated and others not covered at all, more so than is typical at this stage of the year. Most-able Year 2 pupils have not been given sufficient challenges to think deeply and thereby reach the higher standard for their age.
- Across the school, pupils' progress in reading and writing is good. Pupils told me that they enjoy reading. The able readers read fluently and with expression, and talked about reading fiction and non-fiction. The low-attaining readers use phonic strategies to help them sound out the letters in unfamiliar words but had more difficulty in blending the sounds to read the words. Their use of picture clues helped them grasp the story.
- The school has appropriate systems for tracking and analysing pupils' attendance, which is higher than average. Figures for the current academic year represent a particular improvement for pupils who have special educational needs and/or are eligible for free school meals.
- The role of subject leaders has developed well. The school's small size means that each teacher is responsible for leading several subjects. The school has a calendar of monitoring activities, which reflects its sensible approach of including English, mathematics and science each year and other subjects on a rota basis. Monitoring activities span lesson observation, book scrutiny and 'pupil voice'. In mathematics, the subject leader identified that staff needed support with questioning and provided training. You involve all staff in scrutinising pupils' work, turning it into a collaborative professional development activity. However, no one spotted the issues around pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 1.
- You arrange training through staff meetings and also make use of the teaching school alliance and local authority courses to support staff development, for example the class 1 teacher attended a course on mastery in mathematics a couple of days before this inspection.
- Governors bring a range of expertise and educational experience to the governing body. I saw evidence of support and challenge in minutes of meetings, which help to hold leaders to account for their various areas of responsibility. During the inspection, governors showed a reflective readiness to discuss how the school's work might further be improved.
- The governing body had not ensured that the school's website contains all of the information to enable the school to meet statutory requirements in full. Minor tweaks made just before or during the inspection addressed all omissions except for the detail required within the pupil premium strategy. However, because the school receives pupil premium funding for very few pupils, it is concerned that they or their families could be identified by such detail. The governors have decided to seek guidance on how the required information might be presented but without the risk of identification of individuals.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in Reception reach, or exceed, the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics so that they are well equipped for learning these subjects in key stage 1
- teaching provides good coverage of the key stage 1 mathematics curriculum, and incorporates opportunities for deepening the learning for pupils who grasp new ideas quickly
- recent successful work to identify and fill gaps in the school's science curriculum is complemented by similar checks in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with you to discuss safeguarding, the school's self-evaluation and actions you are taking to raise standards.
- I observed teaching and learning in each of the three classes (Reception/Years 1/2, Years 3/4 and Years 5/6) – mathematics, science and French respectively. I looked at some pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning.
- You and I looked at samples of books of pupils in Years 2 and 3, including their topic work, and a few Reception children's learning journals.
- I heard two pupils in each of Years 2 and 3 read.
- I met with the chair and two other governors and spoke to the school's improvement adviser on the telephone.
- I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils. I talked informally with pupils at breaktimes and to a couple of parents who were bringing their children to school. Thirty-five pupils completed the online questionnaire.
- I considered the 15 responses to Parent View and five responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- I read the school's website, various documents including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, minutes of recent governing body meetings, and information about pupils' attendance.
- I looked at the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the checks made on adults working in the school.

- I considered wider whole-school concerns that stemmed from two complaints made to Ofsted during 2015/16.

Several lines of enquiry were pursued during the inspection. These included pupils' progress in key stage 1 from their different starting points; the school's work to improve the attendance of groups of pupils; the role of subject leaders and their impact on improving the quality of teaching; and the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils.