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Mrs Clare Owen
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Owen

Short inspection of Bishops Down Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment in March 2015, you have brought calm and purposeful leadership to the school. You have earned the confidence and trust of your staff, governors and the majority of parents. Your work is valued and the positive difference you have made is recognised. You have maintained the ethos of the school as a caring and inclusive community. Parents particularly appreciate the extra support and care given to those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many parents wrote enthusiastically about the high level of care and respect between staff and pupils. One parent said, 'I wish that every child could attend a school like ours.'

You took robust and effective action to address the lower than expected standards achieved in 2015. You appointed an ambitious and energetic leadership team. Leaders have high expectations and model these in the classroom and in their work with staff. Over the last 12 months, you and your leaders have tackled weaker teaching and have taken difficult decisions, when necessary. Teaching across the school is now more effective.

The issues identified in the last inspection have been addressed. More pupils than in the past are making good progress, especially in mathematics and writing. You have appointed staff carefully and provided a comprehensive induction process,

which enables staff who are new to the school to make an immediate impact on pupils' progress.

Staff are positive about the school and feel proud to be members of the team. They report that leaders are supportive and help them to achieve their best. They also say that the systems to reward performance are fair and include opportunities for further training and development. As a result, the school has attracted both experienced teachers and those new to the profession.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Every parent who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said they would recommend Bishops Down. Many commented enthusiastically about the caring ethos and interesting learning environment you provide. One parent described the fantastic opportunities offered to all pupils, who are supported and challenged 'to be the very best they can be'.

You continue to make improvements. Leaders have used the local teaching school alliance to make effective links with other schools and develop teachers' expertise. As a result, you and your leaders have successfully embedded a more thorough system to assess pupils' work. Teachers use this system well and provide pupils with valuable guidance on how to improve their work. Pupils make the most of this help and they make more rapid progress as a result. Sensibly, you plan further work to engage pupils in reflecting on their next steps. Parents also commented that, as well as the detailed reports they receive about their children's attainment, they would like more information about their progress. They believe that this information would help them to support their children's learning at home.

You have developed a curriculum that is broad and balanced and that makes good use of the school's setting. There are many interesting and enjoyable opportunities for pupils, including engaging in learning out of doors. Pupils I spoke to enjoyed the recent informative visit to the Palace of Westminster. They are looking forward with excited anticipation to visiting the Science Museum in London. Opportunities to develop responsibility, for example as school council representatives and young interpreters, demonstrate good social development.

However, you have identified that pupils' skills and knowledge in subjects other than English, mathematics and science are not as well developed. Pupils learn many interesting facts and regularly apply their reading and numeracy skills within other subjects. However, their knowledge, skills and understanding in geography and history are not yet promoted well. Opportunities for pupils to write about their knowledge and skills in other subjects are also limited. With your leadership team, you are taking effective action to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety and well-being of all pupils is of paramount importance to you. It is evident that your pupils know who to go to if they have concerns. Pupils say they will be listened to and teachers will respond quickly to any instances of bullying.

As designated lead for safeguarding, you have ensured that all staff are trained in line with statutory requirements and are equipped to fulfil their duties to keep pupils safe from harm. Those staff with additional responsibilities for pupils' well-being are very knowledgeable about the local provision for vulnerable pupils. You work well with other agencies when this is necessary.

There are suitable systems in place to check on the recruitment of staff. Governors provide very thorough oversight of school practices, and evaluate leaders' approach to safeguarding as a regular feature of their work.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus on pupils' progress in writing and mathematics, in particular for disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment. We also evaluated the effectiveness of teachers' assessment of pupils' achievement, aspects of the curriculum and the role governors play in raising standards. Finally, we looked at the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- You and your leaders have accurately evaluated the school's strengths. You know what the weaknesses are, and have put the right actions in place to address them. Leaders were well aware that some areas, such as progress in mathematics and writing, required especially urgent attention. The impact of your actions has been to accelerate pupils' progress in both subjects.
- More pupils in Year 6 achieved the expected standards in reading and mathematics than the national average in 2016. Pupils are now making good progress in writing because leaders have established successful approaches to raise standards from their previous low position.
- Recent changes in the teaching of mathematics have had a positive impact on pupils' progress, as seen in pupils' workbooks. I saw evidence of teachers' higher expectations, and the increased opportunities pupils have for solving word problems, for example.
- Fewer pupils than anticipated in Year 6 reached or exceeded expected standards in writing in 2016. As a result, the progress made by pupils with low starting points was below the national average. This year, leaders have made powerful links between reading and writing, and introduced interesting special activities as a stimulus for writing. Pupils enjoy writing and are enthusiastic about the new activities, which encourage them to apply their literacy skills in other subjects. As a result, current pupils are making good progress in their writing.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils did not make as much progress as other pupils nationally. Current information shows that this is no longer the case, with disadvantaged pupils now doing as well as other pupils. More disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in phonics in 2016 than the national average. Currently, your records show that a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils than in previous years are on track to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in Years 5 and 6.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making strong progress from their starting points. Pupils who have a physical disability are especially well integrated into the life of the school. Teachers and other adults work closely together well to plan activities to help these pupils succeed.
- Pupils talk excitedly about the curriculum. They enjoy learning about the world around them. Pupils can confidently explain the tasks set and understand their responsibility for planning their own learning activities. One pupil said: 'If you don't do something by yourself, you will never know what's possible.' In some cases, the results of pupils' topic work are not of the same high quality as their other learning.
- Teaching engages pupils well. Pupils display positive attitudes to learning and clearly enjoy their learning. They behave well. However, until recently, pupils were not provided with regular opportunities to develop their writing skills beyond English, mathematics and science. As a result, writing in other subject areas is often of a poorer quality and the most able writers are not given regular opportunities to fully develop their skills and extend their thinking. This slows their progress.
- You and your leaders use the updated assessment system very effectively. You have accurate and useful information to hand to review how much progress pupils make. As a result, teachers make good use of this information to provide additional support to those pupils who need to catch up. However, you acknowledge that more needs to be done to provide parents with the progress information they need to be able to help their children at home.
- Governors took prompt action to improve their work, after disappointing pupils' outcomes in 2015. They had not been asking challenging enough questions or fully interrogating the assessment information. Governors took effective action after undertaking helpful additional training and seeking relevant support from the local authority. Now they are increasingly providing more challenge to leaders. Governors visit the school to check on safeguarding and to scrutinise information on the standards achieved by groups of pupils. Importantly, these frequent and regular checks include monitoring the effectiveness of the school's use of funding for disadvantaged pupils.
- In the past, some pupils did not attend well and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was below the national average. Over the last year, leaders have taken effective action to address this. Currently, attendance overall is in line with the national average. Fewer pupils are regularly absent than previously, although a small number of pupils with medical needs continue to have higher rates of absence than expected. Leaders show laudable determination to resolve these issues.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum is further developed to deepen and extend pupils' knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects, particularly in writing, so that the quality of pupils' written work is consistently high

- parents have increased access to helpful and timely information about their children's progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Lakey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you accompanied me as I visited the majority of classes. As part of this activity I talked to pupils about their learning and reviewed their work. I also looked at a range of pupils' work on display and when meeting groups of pupils. I held discussions with you, your senior leaders, other staff, the two vice-chairs of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I spoke with parents informally at the start of the day. I took account of 67 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I considered all written comments from parents, alongside results from the school's recent parents' survey. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records, including some related to safeguarding and your own summary of the school's effectiveness.