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Mrs Liz Bedford
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bedford

Short inspection of Birstwith Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You know each individual child very well and develop strong, positive relationships with staff, governors, pupils and their parents. You make sure that this knowledge is used effectively to support each child in their learning.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They feel well supported in their learning and proud when their work is celebrated. Older pupils in particular spoke with enthusiasm about enjoying the challenge of improving their work. They explained the systems and support available in class and directed by their teacher to help them do this. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to go on trips and attend a range of extra-curricular activities, which broaden their learning. Sporting events and opportunities, in lessons and through inter-school tournaments, have a high profile. One pupil was keen to tell me that his personal highlight was going to the theatre to see a production of 'The Bear Hunt'. He then proudly showed me the work he had produced as a result of the trip.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is strong. The good understanding of each pupil's needs and learning journey informs next steps in learning and the type of support and activities needed. Funding is directed effectively and these pupils make good progress from their starting points.

Adults make sure that pupils have a good understanding of life in Britain. Key stage 2 pupils have several opportunities each week to watch and read about the news and hold debates about specific topics. All pupils demonstrate a growing awareness of different faiths and cultures.

Parents are positive about the support their children receive. They are particularly confident in the individual strategies used to help children who need further academic or emotional support. Parents appreciate the out-of-school and extra-curricular clubs and feel they are able to approach staff about concerns or celebrations.

The school is working hard to establish an accurate way of assessing pupils' progress. This is working effectively for younger pupils. Assessments throughout the rest of school are variable and staff and leaders agree that the results generated by tests do not always match the progress that can be seen in pupils' work. You are looking at ways in which this can be improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the safeguarding lead you, along with your business manager, oversee policies and practices well and have effective systems in place to ensure that safeguarding is a high priority for everyone. Staff are confident about what to do if an issue arises, because of regular training and briefings. Governors too have completed safeguarding training and make sure that they check the effectiveness of safeguarding each term.

Having completed a full day of e-safety learning just before my visit, pupils were well informed about keeping themselves safe online. They explained that they regularly discuss this topic, because 'the internet is brilliant, but only if you use it safely'. Pupils said they were taught how to keep safe in a number of other ways, such as when out on a trip, when crossing the road and on the school site.

Inspection findings

- Phonics results have been slightly under the national average for the last two years. However, leaders and teachers have a good understanding of any challenges these pupils may have had in achieving this standard and have clear support systems in place to help them improve. These include frequent ways of practising and developing their skills. As a result, pupils are making good progress.
- At the last inspection, the early years was identified as needing improvement. Substantial work has taken place to develop an early years setting where children can engage in their learning freely, both indoors and outdoors. During my visit, children were eager to tell me about their work on different types of transport. The week's theme was rockets. Children were very busy with a variety of rich tasks. These included: writing about Neil Armstrong; making model rockets (including a child astronaut-sized rocket outside!); finding out information about rockets; reading and acting out stories involving trips to the moon; and watching a film of the first landing on the moon. They made comparisons in their learning, shared observations with each other and responded confidently to adults'

questions. At playtime, a group of boys were continuing this role play, pretending to get in a rocket and visit the moon. Learning is checked frequently to make sure that children are making the best progress possible in all areas of the early years curriculum. As a result, children get a great start to school life, making good progress through Reception and into Year 1.

- You have rightly identified that writing is an area which needs improvement. Current work of pupils who did not achieve the expected standard last year in key stage 1 shows they are making good progress. However, the school's plans do not focus strongly enough on progress in writing for all pupils, including those in key stage 2 and those of middle and higher ability, to ensure that they make good or better progress from their starting points. The plans and monitoring in place are not robust enough to make sure this happens. You agree that tighter actions, specific against the national expectations, and a more thorough and frequent process of monitoring and evaluating are needed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- their plans for school improvement are tightened to include more rigorous checking of key areas for development
- assessment systems and teachers' knowledge of new expectations become more aligned to ensure that the checking of pupils' progress is more consistently accurate
- school plans for the improvement of writing are actioned and result in better progress for pupils in writing in key stages 1 and 2, particularly for pupils with middle and higher prior attainment.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Rowley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I looked at specific aspects of the school's work, including leadership, the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in writing and the early years, and safeguarding arrangements.

You and I worked closely together throughout the inspection, observing teaching and learning, looking at pupils' work and discussing the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. I listened to pupils read and read school documentation. I met with school leaders, the school business manager, representatives from the governing body and staff. I spoke to your local authority partner on the telephone. I noted the responses returned by parents, pupils and staff in the Ofsted questionnaires.