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Mr Paul Sweetnam
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sweetnam

Short inspection of Bickerton Holy Trinity CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your deputy headteacher are clear about the school's priorities and you have accurately evaluated your strengths and areas for development. You have a plan to bring about continuing improvement that contains appropriate actions, but you acknowledge that the criteria for the success of those actions do not focus sharply enough on their impact on pupils' achievement.

At the last inspection, your areas for improvement included making sure that governors better understand your systems for managing teachers' performance and sharing existing strong teaching with other staff. Your arrangements for managing the performance of teaching staff are effective, as current pupils make good progress. You set targets that relate to pupils' achievement and the wider development of staff's skills. You make regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning and provide feedback to staff. There are now new ways of supporting staff in bringing about further improvement. For example, you identify staff who have particular strengths and they share their skills with teachers who have areas for development. Governors also understand the school's performance management system and they robustly hold senior leaders to account. They have a good overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses and challenge leaders well. They ask searching questions about matters such as pupils' achievement and what leaders are doing to secure continuing improvement.

Inspectors also asked leaders to improve teaching by ensuring that teachers make clear to pupils what the next steps in their learning are. You have brought in new strategies to help pupils to understand how to improve their work. Teachers now have examples of writing to aid their accuracy in assessing pupils' attainment at the start and end of new topics. Consequently, pupils make good progress in their learning.

You have improved the quality of leadership of core subjects and this has resulted in the good progress that current pupils make, especially in mathematics and English. You recognise, however, that leaders in other subjects do not yet have a secure understanding of pupils' achievement, although your new planning procedures enable them to have an improving overview of what pupils are learning.

You provide a range of activities within and outside the curriculum that supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. They take full advantage of clubs such as gymnastics, hula hoop club, cake-decorating and choir. Visits from police officers help pupils understand the importance of the rule of law. You ensure that pupils develop respect for other cultures and faiths through a programme of assemblies and lessons about personal, social and health education and religious education.

Most parents are very supportive of the school and appreciate the work of leaders and other staff. The majority of those who spoke to me or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, felt that their children made good progress and enjoyed going to school. Typical comments state that your staff are 'accessible and approachable' and that the school is 'fabulous, warm and welcoming'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Your checks on the suitability of staff are appropriate and thorough.

You have created a strong culture of safeguarding in school. Staff and governors have received suitable training and they are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures. You make sure that pupils understand the different types of bullying that can occur, although pupils say that bullying is rare. Pupils know how to stay safe on the internet because you give them regular reminders through, for example, presentations and competitions organised by pupils who are e-safety officers. You have pupils' welfare at the centre of all your work.

You keep very thorough records of serious misbehaviour or bullying incidents, but there are very few of these. You have an effective process for investigating reported bullying incidents.

Your latest attendance information shows that overall attendance is slightly above the national average and that boys' attendance has improved since 2015/16.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on several key lines of enquiry that I shared with you. The initial focus was on the progress of children in Reception. Currently these children make good progress from their starting points. They entered Reception in 2016 with knowledge and skills below those typical for their age and stage of development. Children's current work in writing and mathematics shows good progress. For example, most pupils can make plausible attempts at simple sentences such as 'I wi sav the wrd' ('I will save the world') when doing work about superheroes. In mathematics, most-able children use their reasoning skills well, making totals of two numbers to 20. Staff question children successfully to deepen their understanding. However, sometimes questioning of lower-ability children does not encourage them to think for themselves. There is a good number of opportunities in the setting for children to practise their writing skills independently, but there are fewer opportunities for developing number skills.
- A focus on pupils' writing and phonics in key stage 1 showed that pupils make good progress. This is because of improved teaching, which is the result of the strategies that leaders have put in place, such as strong teachers working with those who have areas for development. Pupils' books show that they now successfully attempt more advanced sentence structure and vocabulary in comparison with their starting points. Pupils use their knowledge of phonics well to produce plausible spellings of more challenging words, such as 'exploshun' (explosion). The school's own assessment of progress in phonics, using last year's test materials, indicates that, in Year 1, about two thirds of pupils are already at the expected standard, and three out of four Year 2 pupils.
- Pupils in key stage 1 make good progress in mathematics. There are regular opportunities for pupils to develop problem-solving and reasoning skills and pupils acquire appropriate knowledge and understanding. For example, Year 2 pupils progress well and are now confident working with simple fractions and solving problems involving division. Most pupils show enthusiasm and good attitudes to learning and, while there can be some lack of attention in more practical activities, such as measuring, this is rare and teachers manage any distractions well.
- Your school's website is currently not compliant. There is information missing regarding the school's performance, the curriculum, the impact of the use of pupil premium, provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and some details about governors. Leaders are aware of these omissions and are taking steps to rectify them.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders of subjects, other than English and mathematics, develop a clearer view of standards and progress
- they provide more opportunities for children in the early years to practise their

number skills independently

- they include measures of success in their action plans that focus more sharply on the impact of their actions on pupils' achievement
- the school's website is compliant and that they check it regularly to keep it so.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out short visits with you to Year 3, key stage 1 and the early years and I analysed pupils' work. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions and conversations with members of staff, governors, two parents and a group of pupils. I also had discussions with a representative from the local authority. I evaluated 29 responses received through 'Parent View', Ofsted's online survey, 13 responses to the staff questionnaire and two responses to the pupil questionnaire.