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Mrs Penny Lander
Acting headteacher
St Nicholas Church of England VC Primary School, Bromham
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Dear Mrs Lander

Short inspection of St Nicholas Church of England VC Primary School, Bromham

Following my visit to the school on 4 April 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The staff's thoughtful promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and physical well-being continues to be a strength of the school. Pupils told me how much they enjoy coming to school and appreciate the supportive relationships they share with adults and with each other that help them to learn. Parents were equally positive about their children being happy and well looked after at school. One parent reflected the views of most when writing, 'There is a real sense of community here and we love that we feel part of it. A wonderful school, where everybody cares for one another; both pupils and teachers.'

Since taking up your position as acting headteacher in January 2017, you have used your good knowledge of the school effectively to build on the secure foundations put in place by the previous headteacher. In addition, you have invited, and received, good support from governors, local authority colleagues and the school's middle leaders to quicken the pace of improvement. Together, you have identified the right priorities and are targeting them effectively. Your very clear insight into the performance of the school and incisive action mean that the new headteacher due to take over after Easter will inherit a school that is serving its pupils well.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to place a stronger focus on developing pupils' basic writing skills. In recent years, the proportion of pupils attaining the standards expected at the end of key stages 1 and 2 has mostly been above the national average. However, at the end of both key stages a lower than average proportion of pupils achieved the highest standards in writing. This academic year, your work more specifically to extend pupils' grammar, spelling and punctuation skills has swiftly borne fruit. As a result, an increasing number of pupils are now using these skills effectively and rapidly improving their writing.

The second aspect identified for development was to extend pupils' ability to solve mathematical problems. Over the past year, you have tackled this issue effectively by updating the planned curriculum and increasingly raising teachers' expectations. You recognise that this focus needs to be sustained to raise pupils' achievements.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in the school. All staff and governors understand their responsibilities well and implement the school's systems and procedures diligently to ensure that children are kept safe. Staff and governors' training in safeguarding is kept up to date. Your robust overhaul of safeguarding procedures, including the vetting of new staff and risk assessments of the school's facilities, ensure their high quality and fitness for purpose.

Staff are particularly skilled in keeping a close watch on pupils considered vulnerable and are well equipped to act on signs of risk to prevent harm. Pupils report that they feel very safe and explain that they would quickly tell an adult in the school if they have a worry or concern. Parents and pupils expressed their appreciation of the way staff 'go out of their way to help' when it is needed.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, we agreed a key line of enquiry to focus on how leaders and teachers are developing early years provision to quicken children's progress, especially that of boys. This is because the proportion of boys achieving a good level of development by the end of their year in Reception was below the national average in 2016.
- Early years staff liaise well with colleagues in the on-site pre-school and with parents. This ensures that they accurately assess children's skills and needs when they enter the school. This academic year staff have used information from these assessments to identify the children's needs more effectively. For example, they are now providing a good range of practical activities so that boys develop their mark-making and early writing skills as effectively as girls. As a result, children in the early years are making equally good progress from their starting points.
- Our second line of enquiry was about how well leaders are improving the teaching of phonics and raising pupils' understanding of phonics in the Reception and Year 1 class. This is because the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in Year 1 phonic screening checks has varied and sometimes been

below the national average.

- We identified that staff have received additional training in the teaching of phonics, and improved how they plan and teach it. Teachers and teaching assistants in the Reception and Year 1 class now emphasise and model the sounds that letters make consistently and accurately to the pupils. As a result, pupils engage well in learning and develop a good understanding of how letter sounds blend together. This is evident in the above-average proportion of pupils already demonstrating expected phonic understanding, and reading instructions and books at school. Some of the parents who spoke to me also commented on how quickly their children learned to recognise letters and now enjoy learning to read books at home.
- We looked at the level of challenge that teachers present to the most able pupils in mathematics and writing across key stages 1 and 2. This is because the proportion of pupils reaching a higher level than expected at the end of Years 2 and 6 has been below the national average.
- In mathematics, we found that the school's focus on increasing the level of challenge in the work presented to the pupils is proving effective. The pupils make good progress in arithmetic. Pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 are making rapid progress, thinking deeply and sharing ideas about their work in response to raised expectations. However, at times in some other classes the level of challenge offered to the pupils is not sufficient. This leads to some of the most able pupils not deepening their reasoning and problem-solving skills quickly enough. You and other school leaders have made dealing with this a priority, and a key element in your improvement plan. You recognise the need to sustain this focus on challenge to fully develop the pupils' skills and understanding.
- In their writing, pupils across all ability groups, including the most able, show rapid progress in using spelling, grammar and punctuation accurately. Pupils in key stage 1 write increasingly meaningful sentences and express their ideas well through their widened vocabulary choices. Pupils in key stage 2 are responding well to the suitably challenging and stimulating writing tasks that teachers provide for them. Pupils demonstrate an increasing ability to write in greater depth. For example, in science pupils write precise explanations of how electricity is conducted, and in geography of how to use coordinates to locate places on maps.
- An above-average proportion of Year 6 pupils are making rapid progress and working at a higher than expected standard for their age. This is evident in their accurate use of clauses, imaginative vocabulary choices and well-sequenced writing. However, the good quality of the pupils' expressive writing is often masked by their weaker handwriting and presentation skills. This is because teachers do not give these aspects high enough priority or develop them consistently well across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the level of challenge offered to pupils in mathematics is consistently high so that a larger proportion of pupils, especially the most able, make rapid progress and reach high standards
- teachers give more emphasis to the development of pupils' handwriting skills and set consistently high expectations for the presentation of pupils' written work.

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

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and with the other staff with leadership responsibilities. I also met with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms with you and together we scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils and support staff during the morning and lunch breaks. In addition, I met several parents before the school day. I examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, progress and school self-evaluation and development. I took account of 34 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey, 15 responses to the staff questionnaire and 15 responses to the pupils' questionnaire.