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Mrs Katie Jenkins
Headteacher
Benhall St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Jenkins

Short inspection of Benhall St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 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 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 provide strong and successful leadership for your highly committed staff team. Your self-evaluation and development plans are accurately focused on what is working well and the things you need to move on. The safe, caring environment that you and your team have established ensures that pupils thrive and become confident members of the whole-school community. Parents are universally positive about the school's work. As one of them said, echoing the views of many, 'This is a brilliant school and it keeps getting better. I cannot praise the teaching staff and everyone involved in the running of the school enough.'

In the relatively short time since you were appointed headteacher, you have taken swift action to ensure that the provision continues to improve. For example, at an early point in the transition to your new role, you recognised that the school's assessment and tracking system, which records pupils' progress, was overly complex. As such, you lost no time in making the necessary changes. Because of these changes, your staff now have a much clearer understanding of how well their pupils are doing. This is helping them to plan more effectively the things they need to do to help pupils to make even better progress. In our discussions, you spoke

with pride about how staff now 'own' the information and their increased confidence in using it.

Your governors are unrelenting champions of Benhall St Mary's. They share your determination and ambition to ensure that all groups of pupils achieve as well as they should. They are very clear about their responsibilities and so are unstinting in the balance of challenge and support they offer in holding you and your team to account for pupils' progress.

The warm welcome pupils offer to visitors is a delight. They are a credit to you and other school staff. Pupils behave very well in lessons and at breaktimes as they play. In taking on pupils' leadership roles, such as class representatives and 'buddies' to younger pupils, they develop good social skills and moral values. It is clear that pupils' social, moral and cultural development is endorsed in all aspects of the school's work.

Your well-focused interventions in enrichment sessions offer very effective support for pupils who may be anxious and those who need to build their confidence. Although most pupils attend school regularly and overall attendance has improved, you are working hard to ensure that the persistent absence of a few pupils continues to reduce.

In the published outcomes of national tests in 2017, key stage 2 pupils' progress in reading and mathematics was impressive and well above the national average. While the 2017 outcomes, across all key stages, were an improvement on the previous year, you know that there is more to do to raise standards even further. This is especially so in the case of pupils' writing and in ensuring that all pupils achieve as well as they can.

Your curriculum offers pupils interesting and engaging opportunities to learn from. These include, for example, cross-curricular topics, speaking French, learning to play instruments and taking part in school productions. With a focus on continuous improvement, you explained to me how subject leadership in the school has focused, understandably, on English and mathematics. You have appropriate plans in place to extend this work across a wider range of subjects this year.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong and well-established culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff training is updated regularly and in line with statutory requirements. Consequently, your team is alert to the potential signs that may indicate that a pupil could be at risk of harm or in need of support, and so it takes appropriate action when a concern arises. Working together with governors, you ensure that all safeguarding records are suitably maintained, including the statutory checks that need to be completed when staff are recruited.

In my discussions with pupils, they told me that their school is a safe and friendly place. They are confident that an adult would help them if they said they were

worried. Convincingly, none of the pupils who spoke with me had any recollection of any instances of bullying. These views were consistent with the evidence I gathered during my time in your school.

In responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, parents were exceptionally positive about the caring and supportive environment that you and your team have created.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, I initially looked at pupils' progress, in particular in mathematics in key stage 1 and in writing across both key stages. Impressively, in 2017, at key stage 2, Benhall St Mary's pupils made significantly better progress than other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress in writing was not as strong.
- At key stage 1, pupils' achieved outcomes were similar to those of other pupils nationally in reading and writing but they did not do as well in mathematics. Pupils typically achieve well in the Year 1 national phonics screening checks. By the end of Year 2, in 2017, published outcomes show that all pupils met the expected standard.
- In the Reception Year, although fewer children than nationally reached a good level of development, they made good progress from their different starting points, some of which were very low.
- While the small number of disadvantaged pupils make national comparisons less reliable, disadvantaged pupils typically make similar progress to other non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.
- Across both key stages, the 2017 outcomes represent improvements on the previous year. While this is a testament to your strong and effective leadership, you are not complacent. Working closely with your team, you have been relentless in your determination to ensure that standards, in particular, in writing and mathematics continue to rise. Evidence from my visits to lessons and in the school's own assessment information, shows that pupils in all classes, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, are making good progress this year.
- My next line of enquiry looked at the consistency of the quality of teaching across year groups and subjects. Your action to simplify the school's assessment model has made a real difference to the effectiveness of how teachers and teaching assistants track pupils' progress. You are rightly proud of your team's growing confidence and increasing success in using the information to plan learning to meet pupils' needs.
- Your governors also told me how this change has helped to clarify their understanding of pupils' progress and how they now feel well informed when holding you to account for the school's performance. They value the regular pupils' progress meetings that you have introduced, welcoming them as a positive step forward on the road to ongoing improvement.

- In your mission to continue to raise standards in mathematics and writing, you and your senior teacher are leading on English and mathematics. Together, you have ensured that all pupils have access to a range of opportunities to write at length, and that their progress in writing and mathematics is secure. In our discussions, you explained to me how you aim to further improve the consistency of the quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work in books. One example of this is through the introduction of the 'pen licence', a privilege that pupils now have to earn.
- You have suitable plans in place to extend subject leadership roles to other school staff. This is because you know there is more work to do to develop subject leadership across the curriculum and, in particular, in subjects beyond English and mathematics.
- Your early years leader has taken steps to provide additional training for staff in observing and recording children's learning. Consequently, children's good progress is now more accurately recorded. This change is reflected appropriately in the new-style learning journeys that are used to celebrate children's successes. You have made a start on improvements aimed at updating the early years outdoor area. It is right that you have retained the continuation of this work as an improvement plan priority.
- My final line of enquiry was to check whether the very high standard of pupils' behaviour has been sustained since the previous inspection. My short inspection visit to your school left me in no doubt. The warm welcome I received from class representatives, who regularly greet visitors and tell them about their work, was captivating, especially from the children in Reception.
- I was impressed by the confidence and enthusiasm that all the pupils I spoke with showed. Indeed, the exemplary attitudes to learning, as highlighted in the previous inspection, were mirrored in the often mature learning conversations I saw, in Years 5 and 6, when pupils completed 'peer critiques' of each other's work.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons. They are mutually respectful to each other, to teachers and to other adults in the school. In our meeting together, they told me how they learn about keeping safe in assemblies and how safe they feel in school. Your strong focus on ensuring that pupils are protected from any potential dangers in using the internet is highly visible, for example in your routine communications with parents and through the school's website.
- You and your team are working very hard to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly. High levels of attendance are celebrated through rewards, for example certificates, points towards books and popular tea parties for pupils who attend school every day. Any absence is followed up swiftly. Absence trends are tracked closely so that any required interventions can be put in place. You know that these strategies are making a difference because pupils' overall attendance is improving. However, you also know that this work needs to continue because a few pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress with their writing in all year groups and in mathematics in key stage 1 continues to improve
- subject leadership roles are developed further and, in particular, in subjects beyond English and mathematics.
- the strategies in place continue to improve pupils' overall attendance and reduce the persistent absence of the few pupils who do not attend school as regularly as they should.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your senior teacher, the school's special educational needs coordinator, two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and around the school. Together with you and your senior teacher, I observed pupils' learning in lessons and looked at their work in books. I reviewed a range of documents including those linked to child protection and safeguarding, and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, as well as information related to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I also took account of the views of the parents I spoke to in the playground. In addition, I looked at their responses to Parent View and the free-text comments they sent, alongside your analysis of the school's own survey of pupils' and parents' views.