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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Katherine Butler
Headteacher
Bawdsey Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
School Lane
Bawdsey
Woodbridge
Suffolk
IP12 3AR

Dear Mrs Butler

Short inspection of Bawdsey Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 2018, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since you took up post, about two years ago, you have continued to ensure a strong and positive ethos within which pupils are nurtured and extremely well supported. Consequently, they develop into mature and thoughtful individuals who, by Year 6, are ready for their next step in education. Parents are exceptionally positive about the school and the quality of education it provides for their children. The sentiments of parents in their written comments are captured well by the following view from one: 'As a parent, I have received fantastic support from the staff, who have always demonstrated a genuine commitment and passion for my children's development and well-being. I feel that the atmosphere is very positive, friendly and conducive to a healthy learning environment.'

The high standards of behaviour and personal development noted at the time of the last inspection continue to be maintained. This is evident in: the calm and orderly atmosphere around the school; how well pupils work together in lessons; the way in which pupils from different year groups interact and socialise when eating and playing together at lunchtime; and the ease with which pupils joining the school from elsewhere settle in and form friendships with others. Pupils are interested to know about people from diverse backgrounds, and enjoy learning about different religions and beliefs. Pupils describe the school as being a 'community' where everyone is kind and compassionate. Pupils feel very safe and are happy to come to school. This is endorsed by parents in their responses to the Ofsted online survey.

You lead the school with the ambition and determination to make it the best it can be. As a result, staff have high expectations of pupils and what they are capable of achieving. Since taking up the post of headteacher, you have brought about many changes that have led to tangible improvements in the quality of education and pupils' learning. These include addressing issues from the last inspection, such as developing a better framework for writing in English, including an improved assessment framework. This has helped to raise the standard of written work. The range and variety of writing that pupils produce in other subjects has also improved. However, there is more work to do to raise standards even more, especially to enable more pupils to achieve greater depth in their writing.

You have established effective procedures, as required by the last inspection report, for the performance management of teachers, so that the targets they are set are linked to pupils' achievements in reading, writing and mathematics. You meet with teachers every half term to check with them the progress that their classes are making and to put in place support for those pupils who are making slower progress or show signs of falling behind. These meetings illustrate the way in which you use well-established systems to check the quality of the school's work and gain a shrewd understanding of what is working well and where improvement is needed. Consequently, the school development plan focuses on the right priorities and on making changes which will have the greatest impact on pupils' learning, development and outcomes.

The school provides a wide range of experiences both within the school and through the local and wider community. Pupils have particularly rich opportunities to develop musically through local partnerships as well as through playing instruments. They also benefit from an exceptionally wide range of physical education and sporting activities and do very well in national computing competitions. Reading, too, is a strength of the school and pupils develop a love of reading because of the encouragement and enthusiasm of teachers and their exposure to high-quality literature.

Children in the early years flourish as a result of the high-quality and exciting provision. Themed topics underpin the practical and creative activities they are given, and adults pose thought-provoking questions to extend children's ideas. Adults also manage a mixed range of ages, from the two-year-olds to those who are in Year 1, very well. Younger children benefit from the positive role models that older children provide. The Year 1 pupils in turn benefit from a flexible approach to learning, where more formal activities are combined with opportunities to explore and experiment through more hands-on tasks. Learning follows children's interests. For example, a snake skin that a child had found and brought into school was skilfully incorporated into the lesson. It excited children, especially boys, so much that they wanted to write about it and became totally absorbed in composing a story about an imaginary pet snake.

In moving the school forward, you have made good use of expertise and advice from local authority officers. Overall, the local authority has supported you and the school well in developing the quality of education further. You and your staff are also making good use of links with other schools locally to share best practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school promotes a culture of care and safety. You ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, taking advice from the local authority or other professionals when necessary. Thorough procedures for vetting any adults who want to work in the school ensure that all who do so are safe to be around children.

Staff are well trained and vigilant about pupils' welfare and safety. They readily share any concern, no matter how small. The school works closely with parents and families, where necessary, to provide the best care and support for children.

Attendance levels are good overall, but you keep a close eye on the attendance of individual pupils and act quickly where attendance levels fall. Your approach is to work with families to try and remove barriers or address issues that get in the way of good attendance.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, I focused on teaching in mathematics, and particularly on how well teachers challenge and extend pupils. This was because pupils' performance in tests in recent years has not been consistently strong. In particular, too few pupils have been reaching the higher standard. From our discussions, it was clear that you had already identified the need to develop the teaching of mathematics further. The work you and your leaders have undertaken has led to good development of pupils' skills in solving routine mathematical problems. You also identified from last year's key stage 2 results that pupils were less confident in dealing with fractions, percentages and decimals. Books indicate that these elements are being taught more systemically now.
- Teachers provide a range of challenges and usually question pupils well to develop their understanding. However, pupils are not getting enough practice in explaining their thinking and how they have solved problems, especially when completing more complex problems. In addition, work is too easy at times, especially for the most able pupils. We agreed that pupils need more challenge.
- Another focus for the inspection was the extent to which leaders have been successful in improving the quality of pupils' writing. The previous inspection report identified writing as an area for improvement. While results in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 showed good improvement, results in the English, grammar, punctuation and spelling test were not as good. The previous inspection report had also indicated that pupils did not write often enough in subjects other than English.
- Working with your staff, you have developed how writing is taught and assessed so that teachers and pupils understand what an effective piece of writing looks like. You have used your links with other schools to enable teachers to compare and check the accuracy of their assessments. Teachers have also done this in the school and external checks made by the local authority have confirmed that teachers are assessing pupils' written work accurately.

- The school is doing well now in enabling the vast majority of pupils to produce written work to a standard that is appropriate for their ages. In addition, pupils are making accurate use of grammar and punctuation in their writing, and their spelling is of a good standard. This is because these are being taught well. However, when we looked at books we saw examples where pupils had missing or incomplete pieces of writing. Some of the pupils I spoke to said that they did not always have enough time to finish their writing.
- You are in the process of extending your framework for writing and how it is assessed to include guidance on the features of high-quality writing that exceeds age-related expectations. While there are examples of high-quality writing in pupils' books, teachers are not promoting this systematically enough. The new assessment framework you are putting in place should help them to do so.
- Pupils are producing a wider range of writing through work in subjects other than English. For example, we saw science reports and letters in history. In the Year 3/4 class, pupils had written a letter to Claudius where they were outlining the reasons why the Romans should invade Britain. This was an excellent example of pupils putting forward an argument and backing it up with a rationale as well as supporting evidence. We agreed that, while the school has improved the opportunities for writing in other subjects, teachers are still using worksheets at times which constrain pupils' ideas. There is room for more work that enables pupils to apply their learning and demonstrate greater depth of knowledge such as the letter to Claudius.
- The final area that I explored during the inspection was the extent to which governors hold leaders to account. This was because there were some documents missing on the website, such as equality objectives and the complaints policy, and some reports, such as the pupil premium report, which did not evaluate the impact of provision in sufficient detail. By the end of the inspection, any missing policies had been added to the website.
- When I met with governors, it was clear that they are providing good oversight of the school. The school commissioned an external review of governance earlier in the year and the governing body has acted on the findings. As a result, governance is more effective and governors are asking searching questions about the school's effectiveness. Discussion with governors show that they are well informed about the school and have a clear idea of how well it is performing. Their view of the priorities for improvement were entirely consistent with what you told me and with the objectives in the school development plan.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers challenge pupils enough in mathematics, especially the most able, and give them more practice in explaining their thinking
- the framework for developing high-quality writing is embedded in routine teaching, and teachers make sure that all pupils finish writing tasks in English and continue to develop writing in other subjects

- reports on the website, such as the pupil premium report, fully meet statutory requirements and better reflect the evaluation of impact captured in internal reports.

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

Gulshanbir Kayembe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, two members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils. You and I visited classrooms together and looked at pupils' work in their books, including the work in learning journeys for children in Reception. I observed pupils in the dining hall at lunchtime and out in the playground. As part of the inspection, I examined a range of documents, policies and assessment information. These included safeguarding records and records of attendance and behaviour. I took account of the Ofsted online questionnaire responses from 17 parents, as well as 10 written responses. In addition, I considered 10 responses from staff and 12 responses from pupils to Ofsted surveys online.