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Mr Christopher Burman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Burman

Short inspection of Brent Knoll Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead and support your dedicated staff team with enthusiasm and care for their well-being. Parents describe you as an 'extremely dedicated' leader willing to go 'the extra mile to make sure that the school is achieving its goals'. All of the staff members who responded to the staff questionnaire say that they are proud to work at the school. They feel respected by school governors and by the local community. Your senior teacher, who leads many of the school's effective teaching and learning initiatives, ably assists you.

The school listens to and works closely with parents. Parents who spoke with me during the inspection, and those who responded online, noted the strong support given to meet pupils' individual needs. One parent stated, 'The environment is stimulating, exciting and able to meet the needs of all abilities.' Another commented, 'Children learn how to grow with manners and respect that they need for their future.'

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to improve pupils' progress in mathematics. You were also asked to make sure that the most able pupils were suitably challenged and ensure that teaching assistants were deployed more effectively so that they could provide maximum support for pupils.

You have provided high-quality training for teachers and support staff, particularly in regard to the teaching of mathematics and phonics. Teachers and support staff told me that they have a much deeper knowledge of these areas and feel more confident

when they lead learning activities. Improved teaching and learning in mathematics across the school has led to higher percentages of pupils reaching the expected standards in key stage 2 national assessments. In 2016, 53% of pupils reached the expected standard. This rose to 93% in 2017 and current assessments show that 100% of pupils achieved this standard in 2018. While pupils' progress information shows a year-on-year improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard, few pupils reached the higher standard in mathematics in 2017. This formed the basis for a key line of enquiry for this inspection.

Since the previous inspection, school leaders have improved the deployment of teaching assistants. Findings from this inspection show that teaching assistants in each class play a significant role in supporting pupils and in leading learning activities. For example, in Year 1 a teaching assistant provided a range of exciting activities that led to the pupils learning how to blend two sounds to make an entirely different one and then recognise this sound in a host of words. In another example, an assistant challenged Year 6 pupils to use a full range of punctuation as they wrote notes about their visit to London the previous day.

Improved teaching has led to significant improvements in pupils' outcomes in reading and mathematics in all year groups. Leaders have correctly identified the need to improve the quality of writing throughout the school as their main priority. They are aware that fewer pupils have reached the higher standards in writing than in reading and mathematics over time.

Governors have developed systems for monitoring the quality of education provided by the school that require them to ask challenging questions to school leaders. They also carry out regular assessments of the effectiveness of the governing body in order to seek further improvements to their leadership. During the inspection, governors shared various monitoring reports that show that they have a good understanding of the school. However, governors do not look precisely at the impact of initiatives designed to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Governors know that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress but they are not sure which initiatives are the most effective, including actions taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training for all staff is up to date, records are well maintained and appropriate checks are made on staff before they start employment. Governors play an active role in ensuring that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and carry out regular checks to make sure that policies are followed effectively. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are safe and that leaders listen to them if they have any concerns.

Pupils know how to stay safe in school, in the community and when online. Some Year 2 pupils gave me very useful advice to follow when using social media or computer games. Pupils said that bullying was very rare and this was further verified by the positive parent and staff responses to the online questionnaires. All parents who spoke

with me during the inspection said that their children are happy and safe at your school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the particular aspects of the school's work on which the inspection would focus.
- The first line of enquiry considered how effectively leaders ensure that teachers challenge pupils to achieve the higher standards in mathematics. While outcomes in mathematics improved in 2016 and 2017, few pupils reached the higher standard at key stage 2.
- Leaders have introduced a different approach to teaching and learning in mathematics since the previous inspection. Teachers now focus on giving pupils greater time to fully master mathematical concepts and to tackle increasingly challenging tasks. During our scrutiny of pupils' workbooks and our visits to classrooms, we looked for examples of pupils being challenged to reach the higher standards in mathematics. I found clear evidence to show that pupils are appropriately challenged and I spoke with a number of pupils who were working at greater depth in mathematics. For example, Year 6 pupils were able to find recent examples where they had risen to meet complex problems set by their teachers. Scrutiny of pupils' workbooks from the previous Year 6 cohort confirms that more than half of the group were working at the higher standard by the end of the academic year.
- The next line of enquiry assessed how leaders ensure that pupils in key stage 2 are challenged to reach the higher standard in writing. In 2016, 18% of Year 6 pupils achieved the higher standard in writing. Following a decline in 2017, current assessments show that 48% of Year 6 pupils reached the higher standard in 2018. Scrutiny of writing books from the previous Year 6 cohort supports this improved performance.
- Current pupils' progress information shows that writing standards are rising across key stage 2. However, fewer pupils are reaching the higher standard in writing than is the case in reading and mathematics. Scrutiny of writing in English books suggests that pupils enjoy their writing activities but they are not challenged sufficiently to use higher-level writing skills, accurate spelling and a wide range of punctuation. It is also the case that pupils take less care with the quality of their writing in subjects other than English.
- The third line of enquiry assessed how effectively leaders have investigated and addressed a fall in performance in the 2017 Year 1 phonics screening check. In 2016, 88% of Year 1 pupils met the expected phonics standard but this fell to 67% of pupils the following year, below the national average of 81%.
- Leaders acted quickly to assess why outcomes in phonics had fallen. They provided training to boost the subject knowledge of teachers and teaching assistants and restructured groups of pupils to make sure that they were all sufficiently challenged. As a result, pupils are making rapid progress in their phonics awareness and in 2018 80% of Year 1 pupils achieved the expected standard. Leaders also made sure that all of the Year 1 pupils who did not reach the expected standard in

2017 did so in Year 2.

- The final line of enquiry investigated what action leaders have taken to improve the attendance of pupils in specific groups. Overall rates of attendance at the school have been in line with the national average over time. However, in 2016 the rate of absence for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities rose to a level well above the national average. In the same year, the rate of absence of disadvantaged pupils was also above the national average.
- Leaders, including governors, regularly monitor overall absence at the school and have introduced strategies to improve attendance. However, there are no regular checks on the attendance of specific groups. Leaders have worked hard to find solutions for specific families that struggle with attendance and this has led to a noted improvement in the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The current attendance rate for disadvantaged pupils, however, is still below the national average. Leaders acknowledge that improving attendance for this group of pupils is a priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers challenge pupils to reach the higher standard in writing in key stage 2, including when writing in subjects across the curriculum
- they closely monitor the impact of initiatives for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, including those designed to improve attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Hodson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior teacher, various school leaders, the chair of the governing body and other governors. I had telephone conversations with the vice-chair of the governing body and the local authority adviser for schools. We visited classrooms to assess the progress being made by pupils. I looked at pupils' workbooks and talked with pupils in classes and at a separate meeting. We considered the school's information on the progress being made by current pupils.

We looked at a range of documentary evidence including the school's evaluation of its own performance and plans for improvement. I looked at various documents related to safeguarding including the single central record and governors' safeguarding

reports. We also assessed current rates of attendance for groups of pupils. I gathered views from parents at the school gate and took account of 42 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed several free-text responses from parents and results of the staff and pupil questionnaires.