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Mrs Moira Duncombe  
Headteacher  
St Barnabas CofE VA Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Duncombe

### **Short inspection of St Barnabas C of E VA Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 November 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following a period of staffing turbulence, you and your deputy have worked with passionate determination to unite the school and drive forward school improvement. You have been supported effectively by the local authority and the diocese. You are rightly proud of the high expectations, teamwork and culture of improvement that now permeate the school. Pupils thrive and the school is both happy and hard-working.

You have set about school improvement in an appropriately structured sequence. The culture and consistency required is now in place and outcomes are rising. However, you know that further refinement to systems such as the tracking of pupils' progress are needed to support you in ensuring that all groups of pupils make consistently strong progress from their starting points. The recent work to focus on disadvantaged pupils is having an impact, although this too would benefit from such systems. Governors know the school well. Nevertheless, they would also be supported by systems that allow them to hold leaders more robustly to account.

Pupils and parents value the welcoming and friendly atmosphere of the school. Pupils told me that children are kind to each other most of the time, and that when occasionally things go wrong, adults resolve issues. Bullying is rare and quickly dealt with. Pupils value the productive and supportive relationships they have with their teachers. They told me, 'The teachers explain in detail, they give you clues that make you think.' Parents appreciate the high levels of care and commitment shown by the staff to their children. Comments such as, 'It feels like a family' and 'a real

sense of community' were made throughout the Ofsted Parent View survey responses. One parent summed up the views of many, saying, 'The school is getting better and better.'

You have maintained the strengths identified at the previous inspection. Teaching is good. Teachers have strong questioning skills which they use effectively to extend pupils' thinking or to establish if they are confused and need support. Expectations in English and mathematics are high, although these expectations are not consistently transferred across the wider curriculum.

While standards have fluctuated in the past, they are now rising. Recent initiatives to raise standards in mathematics have had a positive impact across the school. Provisional national assessment information for 2018 indicates that progress and attainment improved in both Year 2 and Year 6. Recent work to target disadvantaged pupils is also starting to bear fruit. Nevertheless, leaders and governors know that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is not as strong as that of their peers in many areas. Disadvantaged pupils do not attain as well as other pupils nationally, particularly at higher standards.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and governors are trained well in safeguarding pupils and know the key factors that may put them at risk. All staff and pupils who completed the surveys felt that pupils were safe at school. A wide range of support is available for pupils and their families should they need it from time to time. This helps to ensure that needs are met, and pupils are kept safe.

Appropriate safeguards are in place to help pupils stay safe as they move around the school. These extend to regular trips to the church and in the locality. Fire drills to ensure that pupils could safely evacuate the Victorian building are conducted regularly.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection we looked closely together at provision in the early years. In the previous inspection this was an area requiring improvement. Leaders have accessed a range of effective support to raise standards, including working with other schools. This has helped to increase the proportion of children who reach a good level of development. Children's progress is now checked carefully to ensure that learning is well matched to their needs. Staff know the children well, even though they only started school a few weeks ago. The system is being extended to include parent input into their children's learning journeys. A wide range of information leaflets and meetings support parents in helping their children effectively. Despite recent staff changes the early years class is well established and offers appropriate experiences in all areas of learning. The environment is developing to reflect the children's interests and to contain appropriate learning supports. Staff have a variable range of skills in moving

children on in their learning. Training courses and team meetings are planned to share and develop good practice consistently.

- We also looked at the way that pupils' progress is tracked across the school to help ensure that they make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Tracking systems are evolving. Currently subject leaders, teachers and governors do not always have the detailed information that would help them to drive things forward in an informed way. However, recent changes are developing more detailed and robust information to assist with the strategic review of standards.
- Reading development is a current focus for you. The English leader has an appropriate plan in place to develop skills. As a result, standards for many pupils are starting to rise. Some innovative work has already taken place to raise the profile of reading for disadvantaged pupils, although more needs to be done to help this group catch up with other pupils nationally. Pupils who read to me during the inspection did so fluently. They told me that they enjoy reading, although they would like to use the library more frequently.
- Work in pupils' writing books is of high quality. Pupils write at length for a range of purposes and know how to improve their work. However, pupils do not apply the same care and attention to their writing across the wider curriculum. Opportunities for them to extend their skills as writers across the curriculum are not sufficiently well developed.
- Your work to raise standards in mathematics has been effective. Regular opportunities are provided across the school, to develop pupils' mathematical reasoning. Pupils regularly use practical apparatus, which helps them to understand new concepts. Pupils who spoke to me enjoy mathematics. They told me, 'Teachers explain things well, they've helped me to understand a lot.'

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems are further refined to help leaders check that all pupils, including the disadvantaged, make the progress they should
- teachers' high expectations in writing and mathematics are consistently extended across the wider curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Gordon  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we met regularly together along with your deputy. I also met with members of the governing body and with staff. I spoke to a member of the local authority and a representative from the diocese. I reviewed documentation including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. Together, we visited classes across the school. In lessons, I observed pupils' learning, looked at their books, heard them read and spoke to pupils about their work. I had a meeting with pupils to gather their views of the school. I took into account the views of parents I met at the school gate, and considered 40 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 24 free-text responses. I also considered 19 responses to the Ofsted staff survey and 31 responses to the pupil survey.