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Mrs Kate Batorska
Headteacher
Bridport, St Mary's Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Batorska

Short inspection of Bridport, St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 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 took over as headteacher in September 2018. Leaders from the Minerva Learning Trust have ensured that you have strong support in your new role. Governors know the school well and provide challenge to ensure that leaders continue to have the highest expectations for pupils. From your accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and what the school needs to improve, you have a clear and focused plan that drives improvement and ensures that the school continues to go from strength to strength.

There is a strong and embedded ethos of ensuring that 'everyone can shine'. Teaching assistants provide well-planned and carefully evaluated extra support for pupils. This helps pupils to overcome their barriers to learning. A typical response from parents was, 'This is a very happy and welcoming school and my daughter enjoys every day.'

At the previous inspection, there were recommendations to improve writing by ensuring that pupils write for realistic purposes, and to continue to improve the quality of teaching by sharing best practice in the school.

There has been a focus on providing a rich curriculum and using this to help pupils to improve their writing. Last year, new resources supported teachers to plan interesting lessons across the range of curriculum subjects. As a result, achievement in writing, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and for disadvantaged pupils, is improving.

However, you are not complacent and continue to check pupils' progress to ensure that standards continue to improve in each year group. This checking has shown that by the end of the last school year too many pupils in some classes were not working at the expectations for their age in writing. This year, a key priority is to ensure that teaching in all year groups challenges pupils to continue to improve their writing. There is a focus on pupils' use of vocabulary and improving spelling skills.

There is a strong sense of collaborative learning and improvement amongst staff. You encourage a high level of professional discussion and reflection on what works well for pupils. Morale is high. All staff who responded to a survey agreed that the school is well led, that they feel motivated and respected, and that professional development is used well to support them. You draw from the network of schools that work within and beyond the Minerva Learning Trust and this enables staff to share practice in teaching, learning and assessment. For example, staff have visited schools to research strategies to support the teaching of mathematics.

You also organise regular involvement with other schools so that teachers can check that their assessments of pupils' writing are accurate. To ensure that assessments for writing are accurate in all year groups, you plan to involve more teachers across the school in these checking activities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding is strong. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated lead for safeguarding shows a steely determination to ensure that families receive the support they need. Concerns about pupils' safety are reported quickly to external agencies and escalated if there are insufficient responses.

There is a well-organised system to ensure that staff receive the safeguarding training they need to equip them well to notice any concerns and to report concerns in a timely and efficient way. Governors play their part in checking that safeguarding audits are followed up and that there is strong oversight of procedures across the school.

There has been a priority to improve attendance by working in closer partnership with parents. This has helped to ensure that the school's attendance has improved and is now above national averages.

Inspection findings

- During my visit, we agreed to look closely at some specific aspects of the school. The first was to look at how well children are prepared for learning in Year 1. The outcomes in Reception have declined over the last three years. Each year has seen fewer children reach the expected standards by the end of the year. In Years 1 and 2, pupils catch up well and achievement improves.
- Last year, there were some changes to staff in the Reception class. This has now stabilised. Staff make detailed assessments of what children already know and can do as they start school. You are determined to ensure that no time is lost to use this

information to plan challenging learning experiences so that children develop the skills they need.

- We also explored how effectively pupils develop their phonics in key stage 1. For the last three years, outcomes have been just below the national standard although much improved in 2018. There is a consistent system for assessing and planning phonics. Staff check how well pupils use and apply their phonics at different points through the year. Extra teaching helps pupils to catch up where needed. Parents receive resources to help them to support their children at home with phonics. Staff have received training in developing their understanding of effective strategies for teaching phonics. These actions contribute to the effective teaching, learning and assessment that is now in place for phonics.
- We also looked at the work you do to ensure that pupils make good progress in reading. We particularly looked at the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in key stage 2. Since the previous inspection, leaders have consistently used assessment information well to identify areas that need further development. For example, a dip in mathematics outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in 2016 resulted in further training for staff to ensure that pupils are able to use and apply their mathematical skills. There was a sharp improvement in pupils' progress in mathematics following this effort.
- Similarly, with reading, leaders check carefully how well disadvantaged pupils are progressing compared to non-disadvantaged pupils across the country. This helps to keep expectations high. A recent approach to provide pre-teaching to improve the confidence of some pupils is already showing a positive impact on the proportions of disadvantaged pupils making progress towards reaching age-related expectations.
- Effective phonics approaches now ensure that most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, start Year 3 with a solid understanding of how to read and spell using their phonics knowledge. You now want to ensure that pupils develop a love of reading and have access to a wide range of books to enjoy and this is a priority in the improvement plan.
- Each pupil identified as needing some extra help and encouragement with their reading has extra reading time with their own 'special reader'. You ensure that volunteers and adults who support reading have regular guidance so that they can help pupils to develop their reading skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use assessment information to plan appropriately challenging learning activities for children in Reception so that more are ready for learning in Year 1
- accurate assessments of writing support teachers to provide challenging activities so that pupils across the school develop their writing skills well.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of

trustees and the executive headteacher of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I had several meetings with you and other senior leaders, including the executive principal for the trust and the executive headteacher, who is supporting you in your new role.

I met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with the chair of the Minerva Learning Trust Board.

The 28 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered, alongside views taken from parents at the start of the school day and an email sent to Ofsted during the day. The 19 responses to an online survey for staff were taken into account.

We looked at learning taking place in several classes. I talked to pupils and staff at lunchtime. I observed a senior leader talking to a group of pupils about their reading. I looked at a sample of pupils' books, including their writing assessment folders.

I scrutinised a range of school documents, including the school's own evaluation and development plan. I also looked at documents related to attendance and safeguarding.