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Mrs Joanne Austin
Headteacher
Bentley Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Austin

Short inspection of Bentley Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 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.

The school's ethos is well communicated, and values such as respect, trust and compassion are upheld by pupils and staff alike. Leaders provide strong and effective leadership that is focused on their desire to provide pupils with the best possible opportunities. They are passionate about the benefits that pupils get from attending a small, rural school. However, because of the effective links and shared leadership that they have developed with the other school in the federation, leaders have ensured that pupils benefit from a wider range of opportunities and experiences than they would otherwise get. Similarly, teachers benefit from a greater range of training and professional development.

Pupils behave well and have very positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy coming to school and they have positive relationships with their classmates and your staff. Pupils particularly value their learning experiences in the foundation subjects, such as art and design, science and physical education; they also said that they enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities that they undertake. Pupils' positive views of the school are shared by their parents and by the staff. All staff who completed the Ofsted staff survey agreed that they enjoy working at the school. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school. One parent commented: 'This is an amazing school

and we feel truly blessed that our child comes here.'

Leaders are accurate in their assessment of the school's overall effectiveness and its strengths and weaknesses; priorities for improvement are appropriate and leaders know what is expected of them. Consequently, the school has continued to improve since the previous inspection. Teachers are now more effective in questioning pupils both in order to judge their understanding and to provide appropriate next steps. In addition, writing across the curriculum is now of a better quality because of improvements in leadership and in teaching.

Governors provide you with effective support and challenge; they know the school very well and they are passionate about its continued improvement. Governors ensure that both schools in the federation work together for everyone's benefit. They support the school's development through their contributions at full governing body meetings, their various committees and their visits to meet school leaders. The governing body's use of extra funding for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is helping most of these pupils to learn well. However, there are still a few who are not making strong enough progress. In addition, while most pupils who attend the school do well in reading and mathematics, they do not make consistently strong progress in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Governors have a clear understanding of their safeguarding duties and they are effective in carrying them out. Leaders undertake all appropriate checks on staff and these records are scrutinised on a regular basis by a nominated member of the governing body. Staff are well trained; they know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk and what actions to take should they have any concerns. Staff understand the school's safeguarding systems; they say that safeguarding is a part of the school's culture. Safeguarding records are well kept, and any child protection referrals are monitored closely.

Pupils said that they feel safe at school. All staff who responded to the Ofsted staff survey, and the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View, agreed. Pupils are trusted to offer support and guidance to their classmates at breaktimes and lunchtimes in their roles as peer mentors; they said that the 'worry boxes' in each class are a positive way for less confident pupils to share any concerns. Pupils said that, on the rare occasions it happens, bullying is dealt with very quickly. They said that they attend a caring school and that there is always someone to help them if needed.

Inspection findings

- I pursued a number of lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. My first question related to the extent to which leaders are ensuring that current pupils are improving their progress in writing.
- Leaders have identified the reasons why pupils' progress in writing has been slower than in reading; they included the need for greater structure in the teaching of writing and some weaknesses in pupils' spelling skills. Teachers and teaching assistants have received a range of additional training that has improved their practice. In addition, alongside colleagues from across the federation, teachers now plan more closely and check the quality of pupils' work more effectively. New strategies have been introduced to help improve the quality of writing. For example, pupils now regularly edit their own writing and that of their classmates; they use writing toolkits to develop their ideas, and they refer to their lists of common mistakes to help them avoid making repeated errors.
- Pupils' overall progress in writing is improving across all year groups. In lessons, pupils plan their writing well because they use leaders' new strategies effectively to help them add depth and complexity to their ideas. Teachers use high-quality questioning to support and challenge pupils as they write. The impact of leaders' actions is also evident in pupils' writing; pupils adopt the advice of their teachers and improve the quality of their work. Pupils said that writing has a high priority in the school and that they enjoy it. Although pupils' progress in writing is improving across the school, pupils' attainment at the expected and higher standards remains variable.
- My second line of enquiry was about the extent to which leaders ensure that pupils continue to attend school regularly and behave well. Leaders are very rigorous in their monitoring of attendance and they work closely with pupils, their families and other professionals. As a result, pupils' overall attendance rates are above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is similar to that of their non-disadvantaged classmates, while pupils with SEND have attendance rates that are in line with the national average. No pupils are regular non-attenders.
- Leaders also have clear processes in place to support the management of pupils' behaviour, including codes of conduct that are agreed between each class and their teacher. A wide range of support is offered to help pupils manage their behaviour in less structured times of the day; for example, leaders provide pupils with a nurture centre at lunchtimes. Pupils are also encouraged to be reflective about their behaviour; they are closely involved in the resolution of any behaviour incidents.
- Pupils are polite, welcoming and well-behaved. In lessons, they work well together, provide each other with thoughtful feedback and are respectful of each other's views. Pupils' behaviour is also very positive at breaktimes and lunchtimes, when they socialise responsibly or play in small groups. Leaders' records show that behaviour incidents are rare and that they are well dealt with, while no pupils have received fixed-period exclusions in recent years. All staff who completed the Ofsted survey, and the overwhelming majority of parents

who responded to Parent View, said that pupils behave well.

- Finally, I checked how successfully leaders are supporting the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Leaders have identified successfully the barriers to learning of both groups of pupils. Pupils' individual plans include a comprehensive range of support and suggest learning strategies that teachers and teaching assistants use in lessons. Teachers and leaders check pupils' progress closely and review the effectiveness of their plans at pupil progress meetings. As a result of leaders' actions, pupils' overall progress is strong. However, there are a small number of pupils who are not making enough progress. This is because they are new to the school and the support that they are receiving is still in its early stages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed and develop their current actions to ensure that pupils' progress in writing continues to improve, with more pupils attaining at the expected and higher standards
- pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged make consistently strong progress.

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

Daniel Gee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other school leaders and staff, governors, and a group of pupils. I had telephone conversations with the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I made short visits to a range of classes to observe teaching, look at pupils' books and to see pupils at work. In addition, I reviewed a sample of English workbooks alongside school leaders. I scrutinised the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, its development plan, and other documentation, including the record of pre-employment checks and child protection records. I considered the 32 responses from parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, alongside their 17 free-text responses. I also reviewed the 14 staff responses to the Ofsted staff survey.