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Mrs Hayley Alliston
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Alliston

Short inspection of English Bicknor Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 December 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 April 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been some staff changes since the previous inspection. In September 2018, the structure of the three classes changed so that children in Reception and pupils from Years 1 and 2 are now taught in one class. Years 3 to 6 are taught in two key stage 2 classes. Pupils' attendance is well above the national average. Pupils are polite and well-mannered and most enjoy school.

You pride yourself on knowing pupils and families well. A larger number of pupils than that seen nationally join the school at points other than the typical entry points. When pupils arrive mid-term, there is a precise on-entry assessment to check what pupils know, can do and understand. This enables pupils to settle quickly.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve teaching so that it stretched and challenged the most able pupils. You were also asked to ensure that the most able pupils make stronger progress in their reading, particularly in key stage 1. This work is not yet fully effective. In addition, you were asked to develop middle leaders' skills. Subject leaders have clear roles and responsibilities and use their detailed action plans to set areas for improvement.

You lead a teaching team that works well together. As headteacher, you are

proactive in ensuring that your staff have access to a wide range of professional development. There is a detailed monitoring schedule, and there are robust leadership systems in place to check pupils' progress and performance. Increasingly, this is helping teachers to refine their assessments and moderate pupils' work accurately and is most effective in mathematics. However, the consistency of teaching seen in mathematics is not yet replicated in English. Where there are inconsistencies in teaching, actions are planned for improvement. However, as this work is only just starting, it is too early to see any notable impact on pupils' progress in English.

Parents' views of the school are mixed. Many respondents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, confirmed that they are very happy with the school. However, a minority of parents shared concerns about leadership and management and how well pupils are challenged in their learning. Some pupils also communicated that their work was sometimes too easy.

You recognise that the quality of current teaching is too variable. As a result, some middle-attaining and the most able pupils across the school are underachieving in reading and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's single central record and vetting procedures for staff recruitment are in line with requirements. Staff training is up to date and in line with current legislation. Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training and this enables staff to minimise pupils' risk of harm.

Leaders with designated responsibility for safeguarding are competent in working with external agencies and proactive and timely in the referrals they make. However, some record-keeping is not well organised. Pupils feel, and are, safe at school. Parents agree.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on the teaching of phonics and early reading in key stage 1. Regular and systematic phonics teaching is sequenced so that it builds on what children already know and can do. Specific support is provided to ensure that pupils who have previously struggled with their reading accuracy are catching up. However, teaching does not consistently stretch and challenge pupils at the end of key stage 1 to gain a strong understanding of what they read.
- Another aspect I looked at was how demanding the English curriculum is for pupils in key stage 2. Leaders have begun to upgrade the reading curriculum. You have started to challenge low expectations. Consequently, there is beginning to be a greater emphasis on increasing pupils' understanding of what they read. However, leaders' actions are recent and are not yet having the impact that is required. As a result, some pupils complete reading tasks that are too easy. Activities planned in upper key stage 2 do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to use and apply their reading skills. As a result, work on offer for pupils

does not enable them to deepen their understanding of what they read.

- Teaching ensures that the spelling, punctuation and grammar curriculum is taught in line with national curriculum requirements. However, teaching does not ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunity to use and apply their technical knowledge and writing skills. As a result, too few pupils in upper key stage 2 are able to write with the complexity, depth and structure that is expected for their age. There is a plan of action in place to address this shortcoming. However, this work is only just starting.
- My third line of enquiry examined the impact of leaders' actions to ensure that the teaching of mathematics is consistently good. Children and pupils use practical resources to deepen their understanding of new concepts in mathematics confidently. As a result of staff training, teaching is increasingly matched to pupils' needs. However, a few pupils still have gaps in their knowledge and understanding because teachers do not use their assessments to tackle misconceptions in mathematics quickly enough when they arise.
- Most pupils have sufficient opportunities to reason in mathematics, solve problems and deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts well. Increasingly, the most able pupils in mathematics make the progress they should.
- My final line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders, including governors, to ensure that pupils' outcomes continue to improve. There is a precise action plan in place that focuses on the right aspects for improvement. As headteacher, you have an acute understanding of the strengths of the school and aspects that require further work.
- You are implementing the right actions for improvement this term. Teachers express the benefits of working closely together to review pupils' workbooks and discuss their progress over time. You are providing specific and timely feedback to staff on how to improve their teaching. However, your actions are not yet effective in remedying the weaknesses you have identified in the teaching of English. As a result, some pupils' underachievement persists.
- You have ensured that precise targets are in place for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Systems in place to check pupils' progress are effective. Increasingly, these pupils are catching up because of the support they receive.
- Governors have a clear grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Their visits to the school this term have enabled them to gain information about the impact of teaching on raising pupils' outcomes. However, some of the systems that governors have in place to hold leaders to account are very recent. It is too early to see any demonstrable impact against the current school improvement initiatives. Governors have not assured themselves that the curriculum on offer is sufficiently challenging for the pupils it serves, and they have not ensured that the actions from the previous inspection have been met in full.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching enables pupils to develop a strong understanding of what they read
- teaching is effective in enabling pupils to write with the accuracy and complexity expected for their age
- governors are stringent in their challenge to school leaders so that pupils' underachievement is eradicated, and the requirements of the national curriculum in English are met in full
- teachers have consistently high expectations and adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs well, so that pupils make consistently good progress in reading and writing, including in the early years.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, your class teachers and two teaching assistants. I held a meeting with three governors. I also held a telephone discussion with a representative from Gloucestershire local authority. I met with an external consultant who leads special educational needs. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and gather their views about their learning. Together we scrutinised pupils' English, mathematics, reading and theme books from a range of year groups. I also listened to pupils from Years 2, 5 and 6 read.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, including: development plans; external reports of the school's effectiveness; school performance information; monitoring records; analysis of pupils' attendance; governing body minutes; and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 34 responses to the Parent View online survey and the free-text messaging service. I also took into account the 41 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.