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Mr Richard Culham
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Culham

Short inspection of Birchfield Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019, 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 June 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 and your team have created a caring school where pupils are happy, enjoy learning and achieve well. You draw on external support and guidance effectively to bring about sustained improvement across the school. You have a clear and accurate view of what your school does well and what could be better.

Leaders and governors plan well for future improvements and are forward-thinking. School improvement actions are focused on the right priorities. As a result, leaders have maintained the strengths identified at the last inspection. For example, pupils continue to make good progress in writing and their behaviour in school is good.

Governors are well informed, fully involved in the school's work and offer you effective strategic support and challenge. They have an accurate understanding of the school's current performance and hold high expectations of all pupils and staff. They speak passionately about their work and are very proud of the school's achievements.

You state that one of the school's key strengths is its strong links and good standing within the local community. These views are well supported by the positive opinions expressed by parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. One parent's comment, typical of many, stated, 'The school has a lovely and genuinely caring approach to educating the children.' Furthermore, parents value the school's work in providing pupils with exciting and interesting curriculum-

enrichment opportunities.

You are very well supported by a hardworking and committed staff team. All staff who responded to the survey said that they enjoy working at this school and are proud to be a staff member. They agree unanimously that you support them well and are considerate of their well-being.

My visit to the pre-school highlighted children's enjoyment and love of learning. Their good behaviour shows that they feel safe. Staff are attentive and considerate to children's individual needs. They provide children with a nurturing, engaging and safe environment in which to learn and play. Staff are appropriately qualified and provide suitable care and supervision. Leaders have ensured that welfare requirements in the pre-school are met.

Pupils are polite and courteous and warmly greet visitors to the school. They focus attentively on their learning and take pride in their work. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning have a good impact on the progress they make.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding across the school is strong. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Well-targeted training ensures that all adults know what to do to keep pupils safe. Staff are vigilant to the potential signs of abuse and follow up their concerns with diligence.

My discussions with pupils showed that they feel safe and have a trusted adult to whom they can go with a worry or a concern. Pupils have a good understanding of how they may keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, including online safety and how to respond to cyber bullying. Staff recruitment is well organised, and all necessary checks are carried out.

Leaders know the needs and vulnerabilities of their pupils well. They work tirelessly to secure appropriate and timely support from external agencies. Leaders are persistent in pursuing their concerns with the local authority in order to secure the right support for pupils and their families.

Inspection findings

- We examined leaders' actions to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make strong progress in mathematics in key stage 2. In the 2017 and 2018 national curriculum assessments, disadvantaged pupils' progress in mathematics was weak. Leaders have identified weaknesses in pupils' ability to apply their knowledge, understanding and skills in problem-solving tasks. As a result, new initiatives to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics have been introduced.
- Consequently, teaching is now more focused on equipping disadvantaged pupils with the appropriate strategies to tackle problems in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils make good use of concrete apparatus, visual images and jottings to support their learning. This is improving the accuracy of their work in

mathematics.

- Teachers and teaching assistants skilfully question disadvantaged pupils to check for misconceptions and provide further challenge in mathematics. They intervene swiftly during lessons to help disadvantaged pupils improve their learning, contributing to their better progress. Furthermore, a new approach to planning is enabling disadvantaged pupils to systematically acquire knowledge, understanding and skills in mathematics. This is further improving their conceptual fluency and accuracy and giving them the confidence to apply their knowledge in different contexts.
- However, differences in progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 mathematics, compared to all other pupils nationally, are not diminishing quickly enough. Furthermore, pupils, including the disadvantaged, do not demonstrate their skills in mathematical reasoning by articulating and recording their thinking with precision and clarity well enough.
- We also focused on evaluating leaders' actions in ensuring that pupils with previously low starting points, including the disadvantaged, make strong progress in reading and phonics. You have ensured that staff have the appropriate skills and expertise to support pupils with their reading. Teachers use a range of strategies to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups. Their accurate articulation of phonemes enables pupils to grasp new sounds effectively.
- Pupils have a good degree of success in applying their phonic knowledge to work out unfamiliar words. Consequently, pupils with low starting points read with increasing fluency and accuracy, recognising a wide range of common words instantly. Disadvantaged pupils read with interest and enthusiasm because teachers provide them with text that matches their different needs. This is securing their improved progress.
- Teachers quiz pupils to check their understanding of words, punctuation and key events within a text. Consequently, pupils are developing skills in inference, deduction and prediction and securing a deeper understanding of what they have read. As a result, pupils with low starting points, including the disadvantaged, are making better progress in developing their comprehension skills.
- Finally, we explored pupils' attendance and the rates of exclusion. For the past two years, attendance has been below the national average. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils who have been persistently absent has been above the national average. Leaders have embedded clear systems to monitor pupils' attendance. These are supported by a range of strategies that reach out to pupils and parents to promote the importance of good attendance. However, pupils' attendance, particularly of those entitled to free school meals and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is not improving quickly enough.
- The proportion of fixed-term exclusions exceeded the national averages between 2015 and 2017. Leaders have worked closely with families and external agencies

to secure appropriate support to prevent behaviour issues from escalating. Exclusion is only used as a last resort and is part of a graduated response. Leaders' actions to reduce fixed-term exclusions are working well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and support for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 further enable them to make strong progress from their individual starting points in mathematics
- pupils in key stage 2 develop their skills in mathematical reasoning, using appropriate subject-specific language
- absence of pupils, particularly those entitled to free school meals and pupils with SEND, reduces so that attendance is at least in line with national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Swait
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, senior leaders, middle leaders and three representatives from the governing body. I also held a telephone discussion with your school evaluation partner and met with representatives from the school council. We made joint visits to classes to observe pupils' learning and gather their views about their work. We scrutinised pupils' mathematics books and heard pupils read.

I considered a range of documentary evidence including: the school's self-evaluation form; development plans; external reports of the school's effectiveness; school performance information; attendance records; leaders' monitoring and evaluation records; governors' minutes; and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 32 responses to Parent View and 22 responses to the staff survey. I gathered the views of staff through discussions during the inspection. There were no responses to the pupil survey.