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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Helen Crolla
Headteacher
Benson Church of England Primary School
Oxford Road
Benson
Wallingford
Oxfordshire
OX10 6LX

Dear Mrs Crolla

Short inspection of Benson Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 February 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 are a well-respected and dedicated school leader. Your knowledge of the school and your experience have helped you to lead it well. You have formed a strong working relationship with the assistant headteachers and, together, you are taking effective steps to improve the school. You have written a detailed development plan that provides measurable milestones to enable governors and others to judge the success of your actions.

Parents and carers are resoundingly supportive of the school. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, and all who spoke to me during the inspection would recommend the school to other parents. They appreciate the friendliness and active consideration of the school's community. One parent reflected this, saying that their son had been 'highly valued' since joining the school. Pupils are polite and courteous. They behave well around school and within the classroom. Pupils take pride in their work and are confident to talk about their learning with visitors. Teachers know their pupils well and have developed effective relationships, based on trust and mutual respect. At breaktimes, pupils play well together. Younger pupils appreciate the support that they receive from the Year 6 play leaders. Pupils told me that they feel safe at school and that if they have a problem the teachers would help them.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school's priorities and are effective at holding leaders to account. They have a clear understanding of their roles and

responsibilities. They have a range of relevant skills and experience which they use to support the work of the school. Governors are enthusiastic and highly motivated to ensure that the school continues to improve. They make regular visits to check on the school's work towards meeting its improvement priorities.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that teachers hold high expectations for the quality of pupils' work in all subjects. You have worked diligently to achieve this. You have invested heavily in the ongoing enrichment of the school's curriculum and the professional development of staff. As a result, staff have benefited from external training, some internal coaching and a range of mentoring programmes. Teachers are becoming confident in recognising and challenging pupils who are capable of working at the higher standards. Pupils enjoy the range of subjects offered to them. They told me that they like coming to school because they learn about geography, science and art. One Year 6 pupil said that learning 'is different every day'.

The proportions of pupils attaining the expected standards and the higher standards in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 were low in 2017. However, in 2018 the proportions of pupils achieving at both the expected and higher standards rose substantially and were above the national averages. Pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 has been broadly average. Inspection evidence shows that current pupils are generally making good progress in English and mathematics. Leaders have provided teachers with renewed energy and motivation, and clearer expectations. However, there are some remaining pockets of underachievement that reflect weaker teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

With the assistance of the local authority, you and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding have undertaken a thorough audit of the school's safeguarding arrangements. You have addressed the few minor issues that were identified. As a result, all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have ensured that all staff are aware of their responsibilities. Leaders provide staff with updates when national or local circumstances change. Staff work well with families to address the additional needs of pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable.

Pupils told me that they feel entirely safe in school. They told me that the 'gates are always locked so that no-one can get in' and that bullying does not occur in their school. Pupils also said that teachers address any minor disagreements promptly and effectively. Pupils in key stage 2 were able to recall, in good detail, the advice that they have received on how to stay safe online. All pupils spoke about fire safety and the school's lockdown procedures.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to determine how well leaders have ensured consistent standards in writing across the curriculum. This was a recommendation the last inspection. Over time, pupils' progress in writing has

strengthened and by the end of key stage 2 in 2018 it was in line with the national average. Visits to lessons, across the school, quickly confirmed the impact of the improvements in the teaching of writing. Pupils learn how to write in a variety of different styles and for different purposes. Teachers set tasks in other subjects that support the development of pupils' literacy skills. For example, in a Year 5 geography lesson the teacher effectively modelled the task of writing a diary entry of a farmer living in the Mediterranean. This helped pupils understand what they needed to think about.

- Pupils enjoy writing for different purposes. This was evident when looking at their writing and topic books. Pupils communicate their ideas effectively and their spelling, punctuation and grammar are mostly accurate. Where teaching is strong, pupils are confident to write at length and their books show good progress, with neat handwriting and good presentation. However, where teaching is weaker, teachers' expectations of pupils are not always high enough, resulting in an inconsistent quality of writing. In key stage 2, some teachers do not ensure that the work set fully engages boys. Consequently, the concentration of some boys wanes and their attitude to their work is less positive.
- The first key line of enquiry included the progress in writing of disadvantaged pupils. Although the proportion of disadvantaged pupils within each class is generally lower than average, their progress does not compare well with other pupils nationally. Leaders have identified the barriers that exist for these pupils and have used the additional funding to address them. They have put specific strategies and effective interventions in place. This extra provision for disadvantaged pupils increases their confidence so that they are able to ask and answer questions. This was evident during our observations of teaching and learning. Pupils' books showed that they are making good progress from their different starting points.
- My second line of enquiry looked at how you have monitored the curriculum since the last inspection. You have strong leaders for mathematics, English and the wider curriculum. Some leaders have more experience than others but all are passionate and dedicated. They were able to identify where further improvement is still needed. Leaders told me that the profile of mathematics is stronger than in English, as pupils' work in mathematics shows rapid improvement and more are attaining the higher standards. I saw this when I looked at books across the school. Leaders have developed an effective system for assessing English and mathematics but assessment in other subjects is still at an early stage of development.
- My final line of enquiry considered how leaders plan to deliver school improvement. You told me that training teachers to identify ways in which they can raise pupils' performance in writing and mathematics are two of your priorities. Your assistant headteachers are the leaders for mathematics and English. Your mathematics leader has received effective support from consultants and there has been a particular emphasis on the mastery approach. This effective support is beginning to have an impact on pupils' attainment. For example, in an observation of a Year 2 mathematics lesson about fractions, pupils were challenged to take risks in their learning. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning were palpable. However, the leadership of English needs to have a sharper focus

on developing staff's skills to use opportunities to rehearse reading and writing skills across the wider curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further improve the quality of teaching and learning through the sharing of best practice across the school
- teachers encourage pupils to maintain high standards of presentation
- teachers strengthen progress and raise standards in writing by setting work that challenges and engages boys to achieve well.

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

Yours sincerely

Mineza Maher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I had discussions with you and an assistant headteacher about the school's self-evaluation, current priorities and improvement plans. I also met with you to discuss the school's arrangements for child protection and safeguarding. I held a meeting with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I had telephone conversations with a representative of the diocese and with the local authority's school improvement adviser.

Together, we observed learning in all classes. I talked to pupils about their work and looked at a range of their books, mainly related to English, mathematics and topic. I also met with two subject leaders and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator to discuss the key lines of enquiry.

I evaluated a wide variety of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, pupils' assessment information, and documentation related to governance and safeguarding. The views of parents were considered through 70 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 30 free-text comments. I spoke to parents on the playground at the start of the school day. I took account of 14 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.