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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ms Lesley Murhall
Headteacher
Bonsall C of E (A) Primary School
Church Street
Bonsall
Matlock
Derbyshire
DE4 2AE

Dear Ms Murhall

Short inspection of Bonsall C of E (A) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 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 your school was judged to be good in October 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 the governors share a strong and clear vision for your school as a place where children are at the heart of the small village community but are also well prepared for life in the wider world. Pupils achieve well in all subjects and the proportions who reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics have been consistently above the national average since the last inspection. In 2018, progress by the end of key stage 2 in both reading and writing was in the highest 10% of schools.

You are rightly proud of the curriculum, which is rich, varied and engaging. Pupils told me how much they enjoyed coming to school. They spoke with enthusiasm about recent topics, which included designing and making slippers, learning how to prepare tortillas and, in science, carrying out experiments to grow bacteria. They relish the many opportunities they have to learn to play musical instruments, sing in the choir and take part in sporting events. The long-standing partnership between your school and a primary school in Inner London is at the heart of the curriculum and provides a platform for a wide range of activities. These include educational visits to one another's schools and communities as well as shared projects, for example preparing meals together, conducting scientific experiments comparing traffic and air quality and exchanging letters with 'pen pals'.

Despite having a significant teaching responsibility, you check on the quality of teaching and you support staff in making improvements to their practice. For

example, school leaders had identified that pupils were not using correct spelling when writing independently, so you led training for all staff in how to teach spelling well. I saw for myself in the books I examined that pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 generally apply correct or at least phonetically plausible spellings in their independent writing. In classes I visited jointly with you, you were able to identify accurately the strengths and the areas for improvement in the practice that we saw. In all the lessons I observed, pupils were cooperating well, concentrating hard and persevering with challenging tasks.

Parents are very positive about the school. Every parent I spoke to mentioned how approachable and open the staff are. They appreciate the school's focus on nurturing and caring for their children as well as focusing on their academic progress. Several parents mentioned how their children had grown in confidence since coming to the school. They spoke of how the pupils were excellent ambassadors both for the school and the village. They noted how the older pupils looked out for the younger ones when out and about in the community.

Governance of the school is a strength. Governors are rigorous in checking that they have the right skills and experience to provide the best levels of support and challenge. This includes conducting skills audits which inform both their own training plan and recruitment of new governors. They check for themselves what the school leaders tell them, for example by meeting groups of pupils with their books to find out for themselves about the application of spelling in independent writing and the achievement of different groups in mathematics. Governors take a sensibly focused approach to their work, concentrating on the priorities in the school improvement plan. There is a strong alignment between the work of school leaders, governors and the local authority adviser, all of whom have a shared and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

All the staff I met were able to talk with confidence about safeguarding, both in terms of what to look out for and what to do. They fully understand procedures and systems for keeping children safe and they apply them effectively. They understand that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. Staff and governors have all had up-to-date training. All the parents, pupils and staff who completed Ofsted's online surveys said that children were safe at this school. The pupils I spoke to all said that they could speak to a trusted adult if they were ever worried about anything. You have the lead overall responsibility for keeping children safe, and the strength of the safeguarding systems is built on your close knowledge of the individual children and families and on the positive relationships that you have forged with them. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding was centrally involved in completing a very detailed and comprehensive safeguarding audit for the school. The one or two minor improvements that were identified by the audit are currently being addressed by governors. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding regularly checks the school's single central record, which is fully compliant with requirements to carry out recruitment and vetting checks on staff and volunteers. Pupils spoke to me about how they learn to stay safe at school, and they could quickly give me

examples of what they must do to be safe when they are online. The school is also working with parents to promote e-safety by organising an information evening for them. Pupil behaviour is typically very good, both in lessons and during breaktimes and informal times. Incidents of poor behaviour are extremely rare and bullying or racist name-calling does not happen. Pupils told me that the very occasional minor playtime disputes are quickly sorted out.

Inspection findings

- At the last inspection, school leaders were asked to improve some of the policies and school improvement plans. This has been addressed and action plans now include more detail and more clarity about timescales and which members of staff are taking a lead responsibility for bringing about improvements. Minutes of governors' meetings are detailed and capture both the support and challenge that governors bring to their role in holding school leaders to account. Governors are centrally involved in producing both the school improvement plan and the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness. The chair of governors has carried out a very thorough analysis of this self-evaluation and cross referenced it with evidence of the school's work to ensure that these evaluations are accurate.
- You and the governors have successfully used the area for improvement from the last inspection as a springboard, not only to sharpen policies and plans, but also to develop middle leadership roles.
- Although policies and plans are now clearer and more precise than they were, governors should continue to focus on maintaining and developing this aspect of their work so that documents are an even more useful tool for them in carrying out their work.
- The second area for improvement that was identified at the last inspection was to ensure that the most able pupils were sufficiently stretched in their work. This has been fully addressed. The proportions of pupils being assessed at greater depth at the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2 have been consistently above the national average for the last three years. The progress of higher attaining key stage 2 pupils has been steadily improving, especially in writing and mathematics. My scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that the most able pupils are routinely provided with extra challenge. Pupils I spoke to from Year 6 also told me that this was the case, as did the parents I discussed this with.
- School leaders are rightly determined to try to ensure that more disadvantaged pupils reach the higher standard by the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- As part of this inspection, I explored why standards in mathematics – though above national averages – were not yet as high as standards in reading and writing. You acknowledged that recent attention had been focused on improving writing but that improving the quality of the teaching and learning of mathematics was now the main priority in your current school improvement plan. The introduction of new approaches, including small-group support and timely catch-up sessions, have begun to have a positive effect. Skilful questioning by teachers and teaching assistants helps pupils to deepen their understanding of mathematics and to apply their skills in solving problems. For example, in the key stage 1 class, I noticed that children are very accustomed to confidently

answering questions like 'How do you know?'. Good use is made of practical equipment to secure understanding of fundamental mathematical concepts. The teacher with responsibility for overseeing improvements in mathematics has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of how the subject is taught and a strong determination to raise standards further. Although these new approaches have begun to lead to some improvements, there are still some pupils in each year group who are not currently on track to meet age-related expectations and who could achieve better. Therefore, improvement actions should be maintained and consolidated. The systems for tracking progress need to be sharper, in particular with reference to their starting points at the end of the early years foundation stage and key stage 1 (their prior attainment).

- Although the overall rate of school attendance has been in line with the national average for all schools, in 2017/18 it was lower than the average for schools with a similar level of deprivation. This is no longer the case, and the rate of attendance has improved. This is the case for all groups, including those who are eligible for pupil premium funding and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The current good level of attendance is due to the detailed knowledge that you have of both children and their families and the very positive relationships that you have forged with both. Above all, pupils come to school because they enjoy it so much.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recently successful work to improve the teaching and learning of mathematics is maintained and consolidated so that pupils reach the same high standards in that subject as they do in reading and writing
- the school's systems for tracking pupils' achievements include systematic analysis of progress from their starting points at the end of the early years foundation stage and key stage 1 (their prior attainment).

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Strauss
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

In advance of this inspection, I examined the school's published performance data, looked at the school's website and read some of the policies and improvement plans. During my visit to the school, I met with all the staff, talked to parents at the start of the school day and observed learning in all three classes. In key stage 2 classes, these observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher. I met with a group of Year 6 pupils and with two school governors, including the chair. I examined the school's single central record and a sample of recruitment files and I scrutinised other documents, including governor meeting minutes and a safeguarding audit. I held meetings with the headteacher and, alongside the coordinator for mathematics, I examined pupils' mathematics workbooks. I spoke on the telephone with the local authority school improvement adviser and I examined the results of Ofsted's online surveys of parents, pupils and staff.