

12 June 2019

Ms Jenny Martin
Headteacher
Bierton Church of England Combined School
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Dear Ms Martin

Short inspection of Bierton Church of England Combined School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 the school was judged to be good in July 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 lead and manage the school well. You and your senior leadership team have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and check carefully on the quality of teaching and learning. During the inspection, we agreed on the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching we jointly observed. Teachers assess pupils' progress regularly and you use the information this provides to plan additional support for pupils at risk of falling behind. You have introduced new support strategies and approaches, and are wisely allowing teachers the time to implement them and then evaluate. A good example is the 'live feedback' during lessons which teachers find efficient and effective in helping pupils to make strong progress. Pupils speak very positively about how this approach is helping them to improve.

You are effectively developing the school's leadership at every level. You see this, quite rightly, as key to ensuring sustained improvement. All senior and middle leaders feel well supported as a result of the high-quality training, help and guidance they receive. Your clear vision and drive motivate staff and they feel empowered to develop their roles effectively. As a result, almost all staff are enthusiastic about their part in the school's continued improvement.

Throughout the curriculum, including the enrichment activities, there is a strong focus on pupils' development as well-rounded individuals. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a strength of the school. You make sure that

the school's values are part of pupils' daily experience. This contributes greatly to their positive attitudes, confidence, and the respect they show to adults and each other.

The large majority of parents who shared their views during this inspection were positive about their children's education. One parent wrote: 'We feel that there is a strong, caring culture running throughout the school, along with a desire to constantly improve.' Several parents commented that the communication between home and school could be better. The leadership team have worked hard to establish a range of ways for communicating with parents. For example, a successful event was held for World Book Day. The assistant headteacher took the opportunity to engage the audience of parents, informing them about how the school is teaching reading. You acknowledge the need for further work that reaches out to those parents who do not feel well enough informed.

Governors know the school well. Since the last inspection, they have invested time in improving their skills and knowledge. They undertake regular school visits and use what they see first-hand to question leaders. Governors challenge senior leaders effectively and ask searching questions about the progress pupils make. Their willingness to consider how they can more effectively communicate with parents and the wider community will help to develop enhanced transparency and greater trust.

Children receive a good start to their education in the early years. They make strong progress because of the high level of care and good teaching they receive. Most children attain a good level of development by the end of Reception Year. Children currently in Reception are making strong progress from their starting points.

At the end of key stages 1 and 2, the proportions of pupils attaining both the expected and the higher standards have been above the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics for the last three years. You correctly identified that for some pupils, particularly high-attaining boys, the progress made in reading and writing was not as strong as it could be. As a result of good phonics teaching and specifically targeted interventions, boys' progress in reading and writing is much stronger. Work seen in the books of current pupils, across the curriculum, shows that a greater proportion are making strong progress in writing. However, in a few classes, teachers do not ensure that pupils are consistently challenged to reach the higher standards.

Leaders have tackled successfully the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You were asked to help more pupils improve their skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In a Year 2 class this was demonstrated when pupils used 'Lila and the Secret Rain' to inspire them to write their own diary entries. Using the visualiser, the teacher shared one pupil's work. In response, other pupils confidently commented on: the need to use commas in a list; the 'great adjective' 'tremendous' that had been used; and also noted the suffix in the word 'useless'.

At the last inspection, you were also asked to ensure that the monitoring of pupils'

work was accurate and rigorous. You have a very well-structured monitoring and evaluation schedule and keep detailed records of pupils' progress. You ensure that all staff take responsibility for the progress their pupils make, and expect high-quality teaching and learning in every class to support this. You are tenacious in ensuring that weak teaching is quickly challenged.

You have also played a key role in establishing moderation meetings across 12 local schools. At the last such meeting, more than 150 teachers, including colleagues from the local secondary school, met to moderate each other's assessments, checking accuracy and consistency. As a result, the assessments made by your staff are accurate and backed up by strong evidence.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose and are well understood and followed by all staff. All records relating to pupils' safety are detailed and stored securely. Procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are followed rigorously and recorded in the single central record. You also ensure that full recruitment checks are carried out on everyone who volunteers in school. Your recently appointed safeguarding governor has carried out a thorough check of the school's recruitment practice.

Staff and governors are thoroughly trained in safeguarding matters and confident to pass on any concerns they may have. The detailed induction process for new staff and the regular safeguarding training and updates for staff and governors ensure in-depth understanding of child protection. Members of staff are rigorous in their pursuit of appropriate support for pupils and are not afraid to challenge when they feel that more could be done.

Pupils feel safe in school and know that if they have any problems an adult will always help them. Regular visits from a local police officer ensure that pupils have a good understanding of everyday risks, including those they face when using technology. They talk eloquently about what they need to do to keep safe and why it is important to act responsibly when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection, we agreed to look at: the effectiveness of safeguarding; the progress that pupils are currently making and what leaders are doing to close the gaps between the achievements of boys and girls in reading and writing; and how much the school considers pupils' views.
- Leaders and teachers are working hard to further develop pupils' language skills so that pupils speak, read and write more fluently. This is helping more pupils to make strong progress in reading and writing.
- Teachers use a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics well to teach early reading skills. For example, Reception children use their knowledge of letters and the sounds they represent to sound out three-letter words, challenging themselves to use these words in full sentences. This is helping all

children to develop their reading fluency effectively. It is further embedded through the careful choice of texts that children take home to share with their parents, celebrating what they have learned.

- As a result of the focus on extending opportunities for high-attaining boys to read and write more, this group are currently making strong progress. This is illustrated in the book clubs for boys, which are well-attended and have a significant impact on developing their confidence and skills in reading and writing. Pupils talk eloquently about the high-quality texts that they enjoy such as 'Holes' by Louis Sachar.
- The assistant headteacher's passion for literacy and drama is infectious and inspires boys' engagement with literature. A visit from a local drama group to perform 'Macbeth' motivated Year 5 and 6 pupils to write a letter from Lady Macbeth to her sister. One boy wrote very evocatively, 'My mind is congested with dark thoughts.'
- Pupils make good use of their vocabulary books across the school. They 'magpie' words and phrases from their reading to use in their writing.
- You make sure that the relatively small numbers of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. Teachers and teaching assistants provide effective support for these groups of pupils. Staff have a good understanding of pupils' individual starting points and are skilled in tailoring support effectively to meet educational, emotional and social needs.
- As your website provided very limited information about the role pupils play in school, we spent some time checking how the school values pupils' views.
- The broad range of curriculum opportunities provided for pupils supports all types of learning and actively engages pupils in trying something different without any fear of failure.
- Pupils in upper key stage 2 enjoy the different responsibilities that they have. They talk about the roles of house captains and ambassadors and know that their work makes a positive difference to the school. However, pupils told me that the school council does not meet regularly enough. They say that when they do meet, they give feedback about aspects of school life but do not know if their views are given full consideration by leaders.
- Pupils of all ages would welcome more opportunities to contribute positively to their school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further strengthen the roles and skills of leaders at all levels in continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- they continue to develop strong relationships with families and the local community to further raise pupils' aspirations and support their good progress.

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 Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Varnom
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the assistant headteacher to review your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I visited all classrooms jointly with you or the assistant headteacher to observe pupils learning and look at their work. I spoke to pupils as I moved around the school. I had a meeting with six pupils and looked at 12 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. I scrutinised a selection of pupils' writing from across a range of subjects with you, and discussed your evaluation of the school's curriculum.

I checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements including those related to the recruitment of staff. I met with six governors and spoke to your school improvement adviser and a representative of the local authority. I looked at 23 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I spoke to 12 parents in the playground at the start of the day and considered 77 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, including 46 free-text comments.