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Mrs Barbara Swann
Headteacher
Benington Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Swann

Short inspection of Benington Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 June 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection well. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

Since your appointment in September 2017, you and your leadership team have shown a steely determination to provide the best for all pupils. You know your school well and, from the outset of this inspection, you demonstrated an honest and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas in need of further work. Leaders provide good-quality guidance, support and training for staff. They regularly check the difference that their work is making to teaching and pupils' achievement.

You and your leadership team are ambitious for all pupils and have high expectations of what they can achieve. Your deputy headteacher and subject leaders provide you with excellent support, which helps to improve pupils' outcomes. Staff share your determination and work hard to ensure that every pupil gets the best possible start to their school life.

Throughout the school, there is an atmosphere of calm, purposeful endeavour.

Pupils are extremely polite and well mannered. The 'consistently good and at times outstanding' standard of behaviour that was noted in the previous inspection report has been maintained. Pupils are articulate and able to express their views and opinions clearly, but also listen well and respect other people's ideas. Their attitudes to learning are highly positive, as can be seen in their diligence in class and the high quality of presentation of work in their books and on displays. One pupil told me that: 'We all get along like one big happy family.'

Pupils enjoy coming to school and they behave very well. Pupils work hard and are keen to do their best. As a result, the majority of pupils are making good progress in a range of subjects across the curriculum. Many pupils have made strong progress in writing this year because of the focus you place on teaching this crucial skill. Pupils' English books show that they have purposeful opportunities to write at length that allow them to regularly practise the skills being taught.

The vast majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school and agree that their children are making good progress. One parent said: 'I appreciate how open this school is to parents' views.' Another said: 'This small village school is fantastic, with a wonderful nurturing and caring ethos. The staff genuinely care about the students and this is reflected in the respect the pupils have for staff.' These views are typical of those expressed by parents.

Children make strong progress in the early years and are well prepared for entry into Year 1. The newly designed outside learning environment is exceptional and the children enjoy the varied learning opportunities that it provides. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development continues to be above the national average.

The governing body is a powerful ally in your work. Governors know how different groups of pupils are faring because they have a good grasp of performance information. They visit the school frequently and spend time reflecting on the views of staff and pupils. They ensure that financial resources are targeted to where they are needed most. Governors are proud of, and ambitious for, the school.

Leaders have an accurate and thorough understanding of the quality of teaching throughout the school. This is because they make regular checks and provide detailed feedback to teachers. Teachers have strong subject knowledge, and they know their pupils well. In some of the mathematics lessons we observed, and workbooks that we looked through, we saw that mathematics teaching is not of consistently high quality across the school. This was especially so for the teaching of reasoning and problem-solving skills. Consequently, on occasions, pupils do not make the strong progress of which they are capable.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is central to all aspects of the school's work and leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Keeping pupils safe from harm is at the forefront of everyone's mind. This is because staff

receive regular, comprehensive training about a host of safeguarding matters. They understand the importance of what they have learned and apply it to their practice. Staff remain vigilant and take prompt action if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Leaders work well with other agencies to provide the necessary support to pupils and their families.

Pupils have a good knowledge of keeping themselves safe because they are taught well about different aspects of personal safety. For example, they talk confidently about how to stay safe when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry centred on leaders' actions to improve the provision for the most able pupils. From analysing school assessment information and from looking at a range of pupils' books throughout the school, I saw that a greater proportion of pupils than in previous years are working at the higher than expected standard. You have implemented a range of intervention strategies that are proving a big success, not only in terms of pupils' outcomes, but with pupils and their parents/carers. A Year 2 pupil, who was subtracting challenging amounts of money, told me his mathematics work is challenging every day.
- As a result of your improved tracking systems to monitor pupils' progress, you are able to identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge that need to be filled for them to achieve the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. We observed pupils across the school being challenged in a range of subjects. For example, the questioning within a reading lesson in Year 5 and Year 6 was exemplary and challenged pupils' knowledge and their understanding of vocabulary. As a result, the most able pupils were making strong progress.
- My second line of enquiry looked at how well teachers support pupils to make strong progress in writing within key stage 1. This was because, in 2016, the percentage of pupils attaining the expected standard was lower than the national average. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in writing was below the national average.
- It is clear from stepping through the classroom door that you have ensured that writing is a key priority. Examples of pupils' high-quality writing in subjects such as science, history and geography are displayed with care. Pupils' books show that they have many opportunities to write at length in a range of subjects. Teachers have high expectations for the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils respond well to these expectations. You have ensured that staff training has focused on writing and, as a result, teachers have strong subject knowledge that they impart very well.
- You have focused on ensuring that assessment of pupils' writing is accurate. Purposeful opportunities for the moderation of pupils' writing both within the school and externally have ensured that teachers' assessments are now consistent and reliable. An increasing proportion of pupils in each year group are now working at greater depth in writing, including those who are disadvantaged.
- My third line of enquiry to check if the school remained good was to see how well

leaders and managers have addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Throughout the school, teachers were observed moving pupils' learning forward at a brisk pace. Consequently, pupils were not off task and were focused on their learning for the vast majority of the time. Teachers ensured that pupils were not wasting time and were encouraged to move to harder, more challenging work in a timely manner. Questioning was highly effective, and encouraged pupils to be fully involved in the learning as well as giving detailed explanations to explain their thinking, knowledge and understanding.

- My final line of enquiry centred on the work of subject leaders and their understanding of their areas of responsibility. Subject leaders are highly effective and have a comprehensive understanding of the subjects that they lead. Recent initiatives to monitor the progress of pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics are effective. Subject leaders can confidently identify gaps in learning across the school and how these can be filled. Subject leaders have a wealth of experience and are able to explain how they have impacted on teaching and learning. Regular monitoring of their subjects allows them to have an up-to-date understanding of the current picture within their subjects. Staff training that they have led has had a clear impact on pupils' outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently provide highly effective teaching of writing and mathematics, especially within reasoning and problem-solving activities.

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

Yours sincerely

Joseph Figg
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you and your senior leadership team, six school governors and a representative from the local authority. I spoke to a group of pupils and individual pupils around the school. I made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and conducted several learning walks around the school. I also looked at pupils' books across a range of ages and abilities as well as information from the school's assessment system. I scrutinised a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and current

progress information. I evaluated safeguarding referrals, child protection records and the single central record. I also looked at the school's website. In addition, I took account of 31 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online survey, 31 free-text comments from parents, 38 pupil responses and 16 staff responses to their respective surveys.