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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 Giblett
Headteacher
Archbishop Benson CofE Primary School
Bodmin Road
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 1BN

Dear Mrs Giblett

Short inspection of Archbishop Benson CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 2017, 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 previous inspection. Since your appointment three years ago, you have worked well with new and existing leaders, including governors, to bring the school through a difficult period of strategic and operational change. Some parents expressed concerns about these changes; however, the current staff team demonstrates an effective unity of purpose in driving improvement.

You and your senior leadership team have strengthened the school's ability to meet the needs of an increasing number of pupils who have emotional and behavioural needs. Leaders and staff have also worked hard to improve the school's assessment procedures to take account of the raised expectations in the national curriculum. Increasingly, middle leaders, as well as senior leaders, play an effective role in making sure that these changes strengthen teaching and pupils' learning. Governors know the school well and their challenge and support to leaders have contributed strongly to the drive for school improvement. Teachers across the school now have a more consistent and accurate understanding of what pupils are capable of achieving, and are quickening their progress.

Inspection evidence, including visits to classrooms, shows that pupils across the school behave well; they are working hard to develop their skills. A scrutiny of pupils' work, coupled with school and national assessment information, shows pupils' strong progress. This is especially so in writing but, also increasingly in other subjects. Nevertheless, you recognise that the strengthened support provided for

some pupils has not been in place long enough to fully develop pupils' skills. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and others who have not made sufficient progress in the past.

The school's website warmly welcomes new parents and provides easily accessible information. The weekly newsletters, for example, help to promote good attendance. However, the website does not include sufficient information about the governance of the school.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to make sure that the work set for pupils promoted their good achievement. Actions to improve this aspect of the school's work were constrained for some time by engagement in changes in systems, procedures and staffing. More recently, teachers have implemented new assessment procedures effectively. This enables them to set work that interests and challenges pupils across the range of ability and promotes their good progress.

The previous inspection identified the need to increase the range of activities to further support children's learning in the early years classes. Leaders have tackled this area successfully. Children in both Reception classes now benefit from a stimulating range of learning experiences, not only indoors but also outside in a very spacious and well-equipped area. The wide range of practical activities, for example in the sand and 'mud kitchen' areas, contributes well to the good development of the children's language, physical and social skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and staff sustain a positive safeguarding culture across the school. Leaders, including governors, check the suitability of staff and volunteers. Leaders and administrative staff complete frequent additional checks to ensure that records and safeguarding policies, and training for staff, are up to date and fit for purpose.

The school has strengthened procedures for keeping vulnerable pupils safe from harm. The work of the family support officer and leaders' close links with external agencies and with parents are increasingly helping families who are experiencing a time of crisis.

The school has improved procedures for checking pupils' personal development as well as their academic progress. This ensures that pupils' needs are identified and supported at an early stage. Staff are vigilant in securing pupils' safety and, when the need arises, refer any concerns promptly. Consequently, pupils say that they feel safe in school and this view is supported by the large majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to evaluate the teaching and learning of phonics in Reception and Year 1 classes. This is because the proportion of pupils meeting expectations in the Year 1 phonics screening checks has not matched the

national average in recent years. You have given this matter close attention and have significantly strengthened the teaching of phonics over the past year. Teachers have developed the children's sharper recognition of individual letters and deepened their understanding of the sounds that letters make. This is a consistent strength in both Reception and Year 1 classes. As a consequence, children in Reception are making improved and now rapid progress in learning the sounds that letters make.

- Most children enter Year 1 with reading skills matching or above those usually found. Teachers in key stage 1 sustain an effective focus on developing pupils' phonic skills and use a range of techniques well to stimulate pupils' interest. Teachers check pupils' developing skills carefully in order to extend their understanding of more complex patterns. As a result, a greatly increased proportion of pupils use phonics well to tackle and read new words.
- My second line of enquiry was to investigate leaders' efforts to secure good progress for disadvantaged pupils. You and other leaders, including governors, have rightly identified that some disadvantaged pupils have not progressed well enough in recent years. You have taken firm action to strengthen the support for these pupils across the classes and make better use of additional funding. For example, your appointment of a pupil premium coordinator has ensured that teachers and teaching assistants assess and get to know pupils' needs and starting points accurately.
- You and other leaders, including the special educational needs (SEN) coordinator, check that staff support pupils' different needs effectively. For example, your inclusion of disadvantaged pupils in 'Funfit' physical intervention sessions, and on school trips, supports their emotional and behavioural needs. In turn, this lifts their readiness to learn and enables them to benefit from extra adult support in literacy and numeracy. Consequently, like their peers, disadvantaged pupils are now making good progress.
- My third line of enquiry was to examine the work of leaders and teachers in raising standards in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. This is especially needed for some disadvantaged pupils and others whose previous attainment has been lower than expected. In recent years, you have provided training for staff to establish a more consistent focus on developing pupils' reasoning skills, especially in mathematics. Teachers have a better understanding of pupils' needs and starting points, especially the disadvantaged. This is enabling teachers to provide work and support at a suitable level for pupils across the range of ability in order to accelerate their progress. This was confirmed by one pupil in Year 4, who commented, 'I like the way my teacher shows me how to divide numbers in small steps and this helps me to understand.'
- My observations of pupils' learning in their classes and books showed that pupils are making good progress in mathematics. For example, disadvantaged pupils and others who have not attained as well as expected previously respond well when shown how to undertake calculations in a variety of ways. This is strengthening their ability to tackle problems more confidently. You acknowledge that the strengthened focus on raising pupils' basic numeracy and reasoning skills needs to continue to secure their good achievement fully.

- My final line of enquiry was to examine leaders' actions to reduce persistent absence. Overall, pupils' attendance continues to be above the national average. However, the rate of persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils, those who have SEN and/or disabilities and others from different ethnic backgrounds has been above average.
- You undertake regular checks of pupils' attendance and are improving the attendance of these groups effectively. Your records show that you communicate well with parents and external agencies and take supportive action to reduce persistent absence. In particular, your early support of vulnerable pupils and their families is boosting pupils' confidence and attendance. This is evident in pupils' positive attitudes to learning and enjoyment of school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- maintain the strengthened teaching and support provided for disadvantaged pupils so that they achieve as well as other pupils
- sustain the focus on developing pupils' basic numeracy and reasoning skills in mathematics, especially for disadvantaged pupils and others whose previous attainment was lower than expected
- ensure that the school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish on their websites.

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

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, and with staff who have leadership responsibilities. I met with representatives of the school's board of governors and held a telephone discussion with the chair of the trust's diocesan members. I held a telephone conversation with the head of the local authority's school effectiveness service. I visited classrooms with you and other senior leaders; we scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils during visits to classrooms and toured the school at lunchtime. In addition, I examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, pupils' progress and the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I took account of 164 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey and 140 additional parents' written comments. I also took note of 30 responses to the staff questionnaire and one response to the pupil questionnaire.