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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Louise Putt
Headteacher
Bentley St Paul's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Ashwells Road
Bentley
Brentwood
Essex
CM15 9SE

Dear Mrs Putt

Short inspection of Bentley St Paul's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 01 February 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 November 2013.

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 your leadership team and governors understand how well the school is doing and what needs to be done next. You provide clear direction and this provides a strong sense of purpose which motivates staff and pupils to achieve well. Parents and staff alike recognise the good quality of leadership in your school.

During the previous inspection, many strengths were identified in your school: the good start that children make in the Reception class; the knowledge and commitment to improvement demonstrated by your governors; spiritual, moral, social and cultural education; and pupils' behaviour. These remain strengths.

You have worked hard to provide an interesting and broad curriculum. Provision for physical education, recognised by the award of the 'Gold Games Mark', is a particular strength. Pupils are very proud of achieving excellent results in a wide range of sports competitions. Pupils also benefit from specialist music provision.

Thematic topics are well planned and provide opportunities for exciting learning. The school makes good use of outdoor learning. During the inspection, pupils linked their daily exercise session to science through a game which made the behaviour of molecules in solids, liquids and gasses very memorable. Year 6 made promotional environmental campaign videos and Year 5 worked with a professional drama group.

Pupils are polite and well-mannered. They listen well and respect other people's ideas. Their attitudes to learning are positive. Pupils enjoy their work and talk about their determination to do as well as they can. One pupil summed this up by saying, 'There is nothing we can't do, sometimes we just can't do it yet.' In the previous inspection report, the inspectors asked you to help pupils to be more independent learners. During the inspection pupils worked well in groups and worked out how to approach problems, for example in Year 5 pupils discussed and planned the best layout for a safari park as part of a topic about Africa.

Many lessons offer pupils a choice of tasks of varying degrees of difficulty and pupils often select tasks which really challenge them. Pupils who answered the Ofsted survey unanimously said that they are encouraged to be independent. Pupils I spoke to also told me how much they like the new homework policy, which allows them to make some choices about the tasks they undertake and offers them freedom to approach the tasks in different ways.

Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities, and spoke, for example, about performing duties as elected ministers to the school parliament, form monitors, play leaders, reception class helpers and running their own tuck shop. Pupils express their appreciation of the willingness of staff to give extra time to enrich and extend learning. They speak of the enjoyment they get from attending an interesting range of clubs, including many sports clubs, dance, choir, gardening and music. They also value the interesting learning experiences on offer, such as visiting a range of museums, the pantomime and taking part in a whole-school 'Build a Den Day'.

Significant turnover of staff, including of senior leaders, has made it difficult for you to drive all teaching to outstanding, as the inspectors previously asked you to do. However, in a time of turbulence the good quality of teaching has been maintained through regular checking and providing necessary training and support.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. As the safeguarding leader, you ensure that records are detailed and of a high quality. There is a strong culture of keeping children safe in school. Staff, governors and volunteers receive regular training updates and know how to alert leaders to any concerns that they have. All staff take their roles and responsibilities seriously. You work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe and families are supported.

Those who are responsible for recruitment have completed training at the appropriate level. Records are comprehensive and leaders conduct all appropriate pre-employment checks on staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. You take all aspects of health and safety very seriously and there is good provision for pupils who have medical needs.

The vast majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View', feel that their children are safe. All pupils whom I spoke with said that they

feel safe at school and that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff would help them if they did have a problem. They have a good awareness of when they may be at risk in a range of situations and how to manage this effectively. Pupils also demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when they are using the internet and know whom to speak to if they are concerned.

Inspection findings

- In the previous inspection report, inspectors asked the school to improve the way that subject leaders assess and record pupils' learning and used this to provide suitable work. Therefore, I looked at these systems. Since the last inspection, there have been considerable staffing changes. You have ensured that new leaders of subjects have been well briefed and supported to take on their responsibilities.
- You have introduced a common school system for assessing and recording the progress that pupils are making, so that staff now understand this well. Assessment information is regularly checked by leaders and is used to make appropriate provision for the different needs of pupils. During the inspection, subject leaders were able to show examples of how they identify weaknesses and plan work to address these. For example, the science leader had made changes to the way that pupils' scientific understanding is assessed. Subject leaders work with colleagues in the local schools partnership to secure their judgements.
- I also looked at whether pupils currently are making good progress in reading, writing, and mathematics because, since the last inspection, the progress made by pupils has been inconsistent between years. In 2017, although attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics remained above national averages at the end of key stage 2, the amount of progress that pupils made dropped from the very strong progress made in 2016. Progress in writing has been lower than in reading and mathematics historically.
- Teachers regularly assess pupils and are vigilant in quickly identifying any pupils who may be falling behind. These pupils are well supported through bespoke additional work, or through specialist programmes to address their areas of need, so that they catch up quickly. As a result, the school's current assessment information suggests that in all subjects, pupils in all groups and in all years are making good progress. There is evidence that the school is successfully accelerating progress for a significant proportion of pupils.
- However, pupils are still not progressing as quickly in writing as in other subjects. Analysis of pupils' work shows that handwriting is not as good as it should be for too many pupils, particularly boys. Books also show that there are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise writing at length in their topic work, so that they can apply the strong skills in grammar, spelling and punctuation that they learn in their English lessons.
- Teachers give feedback to pupils about what they need to do to improve their work in accordance with the school's assessment policy. Books show that this feedback is not always specific enough to enable pupils to improve. Pupils often do not take any action as a result of feedback. Leaders have identified that there may be insufficient time allowed to do this.

- I also looked at whether pupils with low key stage 1 attainment are being well supported to ensure that they make good progress. Although numbers are small, in 2017 these pupils did not make good progress by the end of key stage 2. A detailed examination by school leaders shows that there are individual circumstances which explain this. Current school assessment information shows that low-prior-attaining pupils are making very good progress in key stage 2. Teachers and leaders use regular assessments to ensure that pupils are supported in any areas where they are falling behind through sharing 'pupil learning passports' with staff and parents and carers.
- In all lessons work is set at a variety of levels of difficulty and pupils make guided choices about the level they attempt. This is ensuring that the needs of lower-prior-attaining pupils are met, but also that they are stretched and encouraged to catch up.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by specialist programmes delivered by well-trained learning support assistants and as a result make good progress. Pupils with low prior attainment or additional needs are skilfully supported in classes by learning support assistants. Parents of these pupils express their high levels of satisfaction with the provision made for their children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

Progress in writing is accelerated so that it matches progress made in reading and mathematics by:

- increasing opportunities for extended writing practice
- providing a systematic approach to developing handwriting
- making it clear what pupils need to do to improve their work further
- providing adequate time for pupils to act upon teachers' feedback to improve their writing

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Sutton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, governors and pupils.

- I spoke to the school improvement partner and a representative of the local authority by phone.
- I visited all of the classrooms, looked at pupils' work and observed behaviour around the school.
- I reviewed a number of documents, including the school's website, curriculum plans, the single central record of employment checks, child protection systems, the school's self-evaluation, pupils' assessment and progress information, and the school's improvement plan.
- I took account of the 60 responses by parents, 14 responses by staff and 53 responses from pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaires, as well as 56 comments from parents by text.