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Mr Kevin Lacey
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Dear Mr Lacey

Short inspection of Barley Croft Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. 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 the last inspection, you and the senior leaders, supported by the governors, have continued to make improvements across the school. The impact of this is seen both in school and in the community; this is very much an innovative and forward-thinking community school. Your leadership allows both pupils and staff to excel in this school. You are relentless in your drive to improve outcomes for pupils, using the most current research into the most effective practices both in education and industry. All involved in leading the school are highly dedicated to developing the opportunities on offer for the pupils and their families.

You have created a highly engaging learning environment which stimulates the pupils' curiosity, exposing them to rich resources and vocabulary. You have created a culture where everyone is valued as an individual. Pupils value the diversity at the school, telling me they are 'all different in a good way'.

You have designed an engaging and inspiring curriculum, and pupils enjoy the range of activities linked to the topics. For example, the current topic of 'growing'

has led to a community project developing gardening areas which the pupils were keenly working on before school and at lunchtime. Pupils are encouraged to hold high aspirations and they are well prepared for the next steps in their education. They talked to me about going to university and being a surgeon or an archaeologist. Because of the vast range of learning opportunities planned by teachers across the school and in all subjects, pupils make substantial and sustained progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils achieve well by the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, reaching at least the standards expected of them and, especially in mathematics, exceeding national averages. Too few pupils reached the greater depth in writing in 2017, but this is improving. Recent assessments have shown an increase in those reaching this higher standard.

Teachers demonstrate a deep knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. For example, in mathematics, following extensive research, the introduction of a new scheme has greatly improved teachers' subject knowledge and led to higher expectations across the school. This in turn has had a positive impact and pupils are now achieving well. I saw lessons that were well planned, making maximum use of lesson time. All staff in the school are determined that pupils will achieve well and the leadership team has established a 'no excuses' approach to the learning and opportunities on offer to the pupils. Well established routines and clear expectations mean behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary and pupils consistently demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are proud of their own and others' achievements.

Pupils are encouraged to read and they told me they enjoy reading both in and out of school. Teachers model good reading skills. There are several cosy reading areas around the school where pupils enjoy reading together and on their own. Pupils do not always choose more challenging texts to read and this limits the vocabulary they use in their own writing.

Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported well. Pupils who attend the specialist provision for speech and language are fully integrated into the life of the school. You have focused on ensuring that teaching is of high quality and have limited the interventions to only those that show impact. As I visited lessons, I saw effective support from teaching assistants, who asked probing and timely questions that helped pupils learn well.

The early years environment is innovative and provides rich and 'real' experiences through varied and imaginative resources. As a result, children make good progress from often lower-than-typical starting points. We saw pupils immersed in their learning, discovering new textures from nature and experimenting with paint colours. Adult intervention in play is purposeful and unobtrusive, helping develop the children's learning through simple interaction. While the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the early years has been below the national average, the children make consistently good progress from their starting points.

Governance is effective. Governors are dedicated to their roles and understand the impact the school has in the community. They make themselves available to the wider community, attending events and parents' evenings. The governing body has ensured that secure monitoring procedures are in place and members of the governing body regularly evaluate the school's strength and progress made towards addressing weaknesses. The governors have supported and encouraged you to develop the wider leadership team and have ensured a cohesive team of staff across all areas of the school.

At the time of the last inspection you were asked to make sure that all staff have a clear understanding of how letters and sounds can be taught effectively and how pupils' progress in this area can be accelerated. Since your previous inspection, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in phonics has steadily risen and is now above the national average. I saw a phonics lesson with high expectations in Year 1 and teachers demonstrated a good understanding of effective phonics teaching. Pupils are able to tackle unfamiliar words with confidence. Phonics is now being taught earlier on in the early years to ensure that pupils are better prepared for Year 1.

You were also asked to develop pupils' understanding of mathematical vocabulary and improve their ability to solve mathematical word problems. The subject leader for mathematics has been relentless in ensuring improvements in the teaching of mathematics across the school. You have introduced a scheme which has given teachers confidence in teaching reasoning skills. This has helped teachers to maintain high expectations for all pupils. The progress pupils made by the end of key stage 2 in 2017 was significantly above that seen nationally; the school was in the top 10% nationally on this measure. Attainment is also high in mathematics and current assessment information demonstrates a similar picture.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding records are meticulous, well organised and stored securely. The governor responsible for safeguarding makes checks to make sure that they remain so. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including online. They feel that behaviour is good in school and that the rare incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Pupils confidently told me that they feel safe in school and they feel the school prepares them well for life outside the school gates. They know that, if needed, an adult in school will always help them.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in writing remained below the national average. Current assessment information in school shows that more pupils are achieving greater depth in most year groups. In pupils' work and in lessons, we saw many examples of high levels of challenge and high expectations modelled by the teacher, with a particular emphasis on vocabulary. However, we saw in pupils' books that pupils do not consistently use higher-level

vocabulary in their independent writing and spelling can be poor. Pupils have not been selecting more complex texts to expose them to the higher-level vocabulary, or similar. Therefore, they do not use it in their writing.

- Leaders have ensured that the quality of teaching in key stage 1 enables pupils to attain as well as they can in all subjects. Attainment at the end of key stage 1 is rapidly improving. As we visited lessons we saw teachers and teaching assistants checking pupils' understanding and offering helpful guidance to enable greater progress. High expectations ensure that work is challenging across all subjects, and pupils are expected to try hard and work independently. Progress in books is strong and pupils develop their learning following effective feedback from teachers.
- Leaders are proactive in ensuring that attendance continues to improve and persistent absence declines. Persistent absence and attendance have improved since 2016 so that they are now in line with national averages. You have introduced a variety of creative approaches to ensure that attendance remains good; for example, a 'walking bus' and the daily breakfast club, open to everyone, have both had a positive impact on pupils' attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have access to a wider range of more-challenging books and that the impact of this is demonstrated in their writing, particularly their use of more advanced vocabulary.

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

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Ellers
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and subject leaders, two members of the governing body and the school bursar. I met with a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils when you, your deputy headteacher and I visited classes together to observe learning. I also spoke with a group of pupils and with several parents as they brought their children to school. I considered the views of parents through their responses to the Ofsted online survey. I also considered the view of parents in your recent school survey. Together

with you, the deputy headteacher and the subject leaders, I examined a range of pupils' workbooks. I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including that related to the safeguarding of pupils, the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation, and the school's data and tracking.