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21 November 2018

Mrs Bernadette Davies  
Headteacher  
Much Birch Church of England Primary School  
Much Birch  
Hereford  
Herefordshire  
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Dear Mrs Davies

### **Short inspection of Much Birch Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 November 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 May 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 successfully those areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report, and others you found when you arrived at the school. You presented strong evidence that when you took up your post in September 2015, there was plenty of work to do to secure consistently high academic standards. You have used your own evaluations and those of independent consultants very well to identify priorities and to check on their effectiveness. As a result, the school is improving steadily, although the impact of your actions on published outcomes is clearer in the lower years than it is at key stage 2.

Leaders and governors set high expectations for pupils and staff alike. You have introduced major initiatives to improve the quality of teaching, for example in phonics and in mathematics. You are developing the use of the forest school, so that pupils have the opportunity to learn a wide range of subjects outdoors. Published outcomes and inspection evidence both show that these initiatives are proving successful. However, some inconsistencies remain. You are rightly seeking to ensure that through careful monitoring and further training, all teaching is as confident and skilled as that of the school's best practitioners.

Pupils, parents, carers and staff with whom I spoke said that the school is like a family. People know each other well, and I was given clear examples of how pupils' individual academic and social needs are met effectively. The school is also an inclusive community that welcomes new members. The school is outward facing and looks for strong practice and good ideas wherever they may be found. Leaders and governors also ensure that

pupils learn about religions and cultures other than their own, which helps them to develop respect and tolerance.

Pupils enjoy school. The playground provides them with a good range of play equipment, and pupils told me that, typically, whole classes play happily together. Pupils are well behaved and enthusiastic in lessons, and value the school's system of rewards. There is a strong sense of fairness. All the workbooks that I saw were well presented. On the rare occasions when incidents of poor behaviour do occur, records show that you make pupils reflect on what they have done and its impact on others. Pupils have good opportunities to take on responsibilities. Through the school council, they are able to contribute ideas for the improvement of the school. Pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average.

You are now also acting as executive headteacher for another local school. You and other school leaders explained the opportunities that the link provides. Teachers are able to draw on strong practice in the other school, for example in the teaching of mathematics. Your teachers have the corresponding opportunity to demonstrate what they do well. At the same time, you wisely recognise the need to ensure that other leaders in Much Birch Church of England Primary School have the confidence and the skills to contribute fully to all aspects of the school's management and development. The governing body is currently consulting on a proposal to introduce a formal federation of the two schools.

Assessment is an important strength of the school. I saw records that demonstrated how effectively leaders use information about pupils' attainment and progress to identify those at risk of falling behind. You also use the information to help you make judgements on the quality of teaching, and on the effectiveness of particular strategies. For example, you recently changed the ways in which you support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) because their progress had not been as strong as you would have liked. Pupils receive detailed feedback from both teachers and their peers. Teachers make sure that pupils understand how to use that feedback to improve their work, and check that they have done so.

Governors provide effective oversight of the school, including its safeguarding arrangements. They use their expertise well in their service of the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. All arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff know their pupils and the community well. Leaders have made sure that staff are thoroughly trained to identify any problems that pupils may face, and are alert to signs that they may not be safe. The school's records show that on the relatively rare occasions when a risk to pupils arises, leaders work effectively with parents and other agencies to protect children. The school site is secure, and leaders have worked hard with the local community to minimise the risks posed by the proximity to major roads.

Pupils told me that they feel entirely safe in school. They said that bullying occurs very rarely, if at all. They placed great confidence in the 'worry box' that allows pupils to express an anonymous concern. Pupils were able to recall in good detail the advice that they have

received on how to stay safe online. They also know in detail about road safety.

## **Inspection findings**

- Children in their Reception Year have good opportunities to develop their early writing, and over time, they make strong progress. In recent years, a high proportion of children have attained the early learning goal in writing. In 2018, key stage 1 pupils' attainment in writing was well above the national average.
- As pupils progress up the school, their writing develops well. Leaders have set the same high standard for writing in all subjects. Teachers provide pupils with varied and imaginative writing tasks. They give pupils detailed guidance about how to improve their work in response to feedback.
- In your development planning, you have prioritised increasing the proportions of pupils who attain at greater depth. This places a helpful emphasis on high standards and the setting of challenging work. For example, in mathematics, teachers require all pupils to reason mathematically and to apply their learning in practical ways. In the key stage 2 lessons that I observed, pupils responded well to demanding tasks and the teachers' use of ambitious subject-specific vocabulary.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum engages pupils' interest and allows them to develop a suitably wide range of skills. Pupils benefit from trips to relevant places, and from visitors to the school. For example, on the day of the inspection, a former soldier and amputee discussed his experience with Year 6 pupils, and some older pupils were on a residential visit to the Isle of Wight. The school provides a diverse range of extra-curricular activities, which pupils and their parents greatly appreciate. These have included fencing, pottery, singing and coding.
- In planning pupils' work, teachers give due regard to developing pupils' skills and understanding in foundation subjects over time. In science, pupils learn how to work scientifically, as well as learning the knowledge associated with each topic. Work scrutiny showed me that attainment in foundation subjects is generally high, in part because teachers expect work to be of the same standard as pupils' work in English and mathematics. Pupils learn the importance of health and fitness. All pupils complete a daily mile, and those I spoke with explained to me in detail the benefits of healthy eating. The strengths of the curriculum are not apparent from the school's website.
- The school works effectively with parents. In Reception Year, parents contribute significantly to children's learning, by recording what their children have done. Leaders hold meetings at which they explain how the school approaches particular topics, such as the teaching of phonics or online safety. The school regularly provides parents with details of the themes that pupils are studying. From time to time, the school surveys parental opinion, and endeavours to address any concerns that are raised. Some parents expressed concerns about the time and energy that leaders have expended in working with another school. However, a large majority of respondents to Parent View, and all those that I spoke with, expressed strong appreciation and support for the school.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils with high attainment continues to rise in each year group and in all subjects
- staff receive the training they need to contribute fully to the future leadership and management of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Spoor  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders and governors. I also held informal conversations with other members of staff. I spoke by telephone with a representative of the local authority, and the consultant who works regularly with the school. I observed the teaching of English, mathematics and physical education jointly with senior leaders. I scrutinised pupils' work from the current academic year and last year. I met with a group of pupils to gather their views, and spoke informally with several more. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I observed pupils' behaviour at social times and when they moved around the school.

I took account of the 38 recent responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also considered the 14 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, and the 96 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

I scrutinised a wide range of documents both electronically and on paper, including: the school's evaluation of its own performance and its plans for improvement; evidence of communication with parents; records of governors' meetings; two external reviews of the school; policies; curriculum plans; and records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I looked in detail at records that show how the school keeps pupils safe.