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Mr W Davies
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Dear Mr Davies

Short inspection of Bitterley Church of England Primary School (Aided)

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You appreciate the challenges and benefits of leading a small rural school. The school motto, 'small school, big family', reflects the school's distinctive ethos as a caring and friendly school. Parents and carers told me again and again about the nurturing family atmosphere, where their children are well cared for by staff.

The warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school is underpinned by a strong Christian ethos. Values such as courage, care, patience, tolerance and understanding strengthen this ethos. These values are well understood by all members of the school community and are visibly apparent in the work of the school. As a result, pupils flourish in a safe environment that supports them well, both academically and pastorally.

You know the school well and lead it with energy and a clear sense of purpose. You have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You are aware of the strengths in teaching, as well as the areas that still need to be developed further. The school's priorities this year have included improving pupils' mathematical skills. This remains a focus because some still need to develop their skills of mathematical reasoning further. You have also worked with your staff to improve spelling within the school and this focus is now having notable impact.

You have an outward-looking attitude to improvement. This means that you actively seek opportunities to bring expertise and skills into the school. You provide high-

quality training for staff through work with other schools. You are well supported in this work by the trust. All this is making a good contribution to how well pupils are currently doing.

Governance of the school is strategic and strong. Governors have a range of relevant skills and experience to support the work of the school. Where necessary, they use these to provide challenge. The chair of governors has created a 'link governor' approach, which determines a responsibility for each governor to have a deep, clear knowledge of one or more aspects of the work of the school. In this capacity, governors undertake monitoring activities and give feedback on their findings to the other governors. Consequently, governors are kept up to date with the strengths and development areas within the school.

Pupils' excellent behaviour makes a strong contribution to their learning. They cooperate well together in the many opportunities they are given for collaborative work. You have ensured that pupils understand the learning attitudes and behaviours that will bring success. Pupils show respect for the adults in school and particularly appreciate the efforts that their teachers make to create lessons that are fun and interesting. One parent said that her children have 'a voracious appetite for learning'.

Leaders ensure that the school is highly inclusive, which means a high level of mobility into the school of pupils who have sometimes very complex needs. All staff value every pupil as an individual and are actively deployed to support pupils who have additional needs. This provision is highly effective and pupils quickly settle into school and engage with learning. Leaders are aware that in the short term, this can have an adverse effect on apparent levels of achievement. However, they believe that every child should be given the resources and support to enable them to thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your staff take safeguarding extremely seriously. Everyone understands their individual responsibility to make sure that every child is protected from harm. All staff receive regular training in how to keep children safe. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding policies and procedures and are vigilant for any sign that a pupil could be at risk.

The school's records of pupils who are a concern are detailed, well organised and kept securely. Leaders have ensured that staff have easy access to the forms used to record concerns. You are fastidious with your record keeping, ensuring that all follow-up action is recorded. You follow up concerns swiftly and keep a chronology of actions taken.

Pupils know that they must treat others in the school kindly and courteously. They report that bullying is very rare, but that any incidents of poor behaviour or unkindness are effectively dealt with. They told me that they feel safe in school.

They explained the different ways staff help them to keep safe and to care for themselves, including how to keep themselves safe online. They know that they must immediately show an adult any evidence of an unsuitable message or image on a computer and never to give personal details to someone they don't know.

Inspection findings

- Published attainment and progress data for the school has fluctuated over time because of the small numbers in each year group. However, because the school is small, you know every pupil very well. You have established robust systems to check, on a regular basis, that pupils are making enough progress.
- At the start of the inspection, you and I agreed the aspects of the school's work that we would consider closely. The first of these was to look at teaching and learning in mathematics. You had already identified this as an area the school needs to improve. Pupils are given many opportunities to talk so that mathematical vocabulary is developed and they learn in partnership with their peers. Although the teaching of arithmetic is consistent and effective, you are seeking to improve pupils' ability to apply mathematical reasoning in problem-solving and investigative activities. Teachers are receiving training to help them foster these skills, but although some teachers are now providing pupils with deeper thinking challenge, this is not consistent across the school yet. In some classes, opportunities for pupils to explain and justify their thinking are missed.
- I also focused some of the inspection on considering the quality of writing across the school. Evidence in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils are given many opportunities to write extensively. Writing skills, including grammar and the features of particular writing genres, are systematically taught and then drawn together in extended pieces of writing. Pupils are also given the opportunity to write in the context of other curriculum subjects and the quality of this writing is of the same calibre as pupils' writing in English lessons. Across the school, the presentation and quality of handwriting do not match the quality of the content in writing. Teachers do not consistently demand high levels of presentation in pupils' work and do not always reinforce handwriting skills. This means that some pupils' books are untidy and sometimes letters are not correctly formed.
- My final line of enquiry was to establish the impact of leaders' actions to provide challenge for the most able pupils, particularly in key stage 1. You have already begun to address this. Teachers stretch pupils through the use of thought-provoking questioning and challenging pupils to use sophisticated vocabulary and more complex sentence types. Currently, the proportion of pupils who are on track to achieve the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics has improved in both key stages. You recognise that you need to maintain the work that has already been successful so that standards continue to rise.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a continued focus on promoting deeper thinking skills of reasoning in mathematics by:
 - providing more opportunities for problem-solving and investigation in mathematics
 - taking more advantage of opportunities that require pupils to explain and justify their mathematical thinking
- teachers place higher priority on improving pupils' handwriting and presentation skills
- teachers continue to stretch the most able pupils so that they achieve the highest standards of which they are capable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Hereford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Shropshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other members of school staff and members of the governing body. I also spoke on the telephone to the chief executive officer of the Bishop Anthony Educational Trust and the school's improvement adviser. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look in their books. I looked at an extensive range of current books from each year group. I also spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. Some parents wrote letters to me and I also took into account the views of 15 parents and 10 staff who responded to the online survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. I scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.