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Mrs Gemma Coward
Acting Headteacher
St Bartholomew's Church of England First School
Kithill
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Dear Mrs Coward

Short inspection of St Bartholomew's Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is recovering from tragic circumstances, which has resulted in significant changes in the leadership of the school. Your formidable leadership is testament to your predecessor's conviction and skill in empowering staff and his unwavering drive for school improvement. You have valued the significant support provided by your Somerset education partner in ensuring that you are successful in your new role. Parents, governors, staff and local authority officers are unanimous in their praise for your determined efforts to keep the school 'on course' in challenging circumstances. You lead with a steely moral purpose. You have successfully built upon the strong systems put in place by your predecessor. Staff morale remains high. Staff are proud to work at the school. Good teaching inspires pupils to work hard and achieve well in both their personal and academic development. Consequently, pupils thrive in this nurturing haven.

You provide the team with dynamic leadership and demonstrate a staunch commitment to school improvement. Your partnership work with other local schools has been instrumental in developing strong and effective assessment procedures in the light of curriculum changes. At the end of key stage 1, outcomes are above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Your middle school colleagues praise the accuracy of teacher's assessments and confirm that pupils of St Bartholomew's are well prepared for the next stage in their education when they leave you.

At the time of the last inspection, the school was federated and governors were

asked to increase their checks on the school's work. The federation ended in April 2015. The now small governing body has a strong knowledge of the school's work because governors visit the school regularly. In recent months, they have been particularly mindful of the need to stabilise the school, nurture staff and provide pastoral support. Staff have valued this enormously. However, governors recognise the need to drive improvement even more quickly. Together, you have identified the need for governors to provide greater challenge so that the school continues to be successful.

You were also asked to raise teachers' expectations so that pupils produce work of high quality. More of the most able pupils are achieving at the highest standards now. Your focus on pupils taking greater pride in their learning is also supporting improved standards of presentation.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff look after pupils well and work closely with families. Consequently, where there are concerns, everyone works together to overcome issues. Training has ensured that staff are vigilant in identifying and referring any concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. When you refer pupils for specialist support, you ensure that responses are timely and address pupils' specific needs. In doing so, you successfully reduce the barriers to pupils' well-being.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You recently initiated a local authority safeguarding audit. Your team has acted swiftly to tackle shortcomings, for example by increasing security of the school site. Effective recruitment checks are in place for staff and volunteers. Safeguarding documentation is meticulously organised. In addition, your changes to the organisation of the beginning of the school day to ensure a calm and safe start has been well received by parents.

Pupils work and play happily together. They appreciate the support of playground buddies, who help them to make friends and play safely. Pupils say bullying is rare and they are confident that if buddies cannot help then adults will.

In the past, the attendance of some groups of pupils has been poor. Holidays taken in term time are still an issue for the school. You are taking a firm stance and are issuing penalty notices where appropriate. This is leading to improvements, but there is still more to be done to ensure that all pupils attend regularly.

Inspection findings

At the start of the inspection, we agreed the particular aspects of the school's work that the inspection would focus on.

- Firstly, we focused on the effectiveness of support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is a strength of the school. Close work over time with pre-schools ensures that teachers have a good understanding of pupils' needs before they join the school. The governors' strategic decision to deploy the teacher with responsibility for special educational needs to teach in the Reception and Year 1 classes has been hugely beneficial. The very early identification of needs ensures that no time is wasted in providing children with

the support they need to remove barriers to their learning. Consequently, children get off to a very good start.

- The special educational needs leader is highly effective. She draws upon external specialists to make sure that teachers have the skills they need to support the needs of individual pupils. Leaders have drawn on solutions such as 'Pets as Therapy' to help pupils develop a love of, and confidence in, reading. Parents of pupils are effusive about their child's progress. In particular, parents praise the school's work for supporting pupils' social and emotional needs. For example, every member of staff, including office and caretaking staff, receives training so that approaches to dealing with pupils' anxieties are consistent. Consequently, staff are often able to pre-empt situations so that learning time is not lost. Pupils with heightened levels of anxiety are supported well so that they can become successful learners.
- Next, we considered the impact of leaders' use of the additional pupil premium funding. The few disadvantaged pupils in the school make good progress. Historically, fewer middle-attaining disadvantaged pupils have made accelerated progress to achieve the highest standard. This trend is changing. Focused one-to-one support for these pupils, often provided by teachers, is helping to remove barriers to their learning. In addition, homework clubs have further supported pupils' needs. Last year, more disadvantaged pupils than previously made good progress to achieve the highest standards.
- The progress of the most able pupils was also an area we considered. A greater number of pupils in 2017 achieved the highest standards compared to others nationally. The most able pupils continue to make good progress as a result of teachers' good subject knowledge. Our scrutiny of work in pupils' books showed that teachers have high expectations. For example, work to improve pupils' presentation and handwriting is beginning to have a positive impact. Pupils in key stage two are continuing to achieve well so that they are well prepared when they leave the school in Year 4. You and your team have rightly identified the need to ensure that more of the middle-attaining pupils make accelerated progress to achieve the highest standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement plan targets are sufficiently precise so that governors can provide effective challenge and measure the impact of initiatives to act swiftly to changing priorities to improve outcomes further
- the progress of middle-attaining pupils accelerates so that more achieve the highest standards
- they continue to take effective action to improve pupils' attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Hannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we carried out visits to classrooms, reviewed pupils' work and looked at the school's assessment information. I spoke with pupils in lessons. Meetings were held with you, senior leaders and the headteacher of the local middle school. I also met with two representatives from your governing body. I held a telephone conversation with your school improvement partner and another with the Somerset education partner.

I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation and development plan, assessment information and safeguarding records. I considered the views of 21 parents who responded to Parent View and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires of 17 pupils and 25 members of staff.