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Mrs Amanda Clarey
Headteacher
Barlaston CofE (C) First School
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Dear Mrs Clarey

Short inspection of Barlaston CofE (C) First School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 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 September 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 know the school extremely well, have high expectations of yourself and your staff and are determined to achieve the best possible outcomes for every pupil. You are supported well by your staff and governors, who are ambitious to provide the best possible education for pupils. You, together with your staff and governors, have created a strong team which puts the needs of pupils first. You work tirelessly to ensure that pupils are safe, well cared for and achieve well.

Subject leaders monitor teaching and learning in their subjects, scrutinise pupils' work, analyse test results and accurately identify areas of strength and where improvements are needed. Improvement points are highlighted in the school improvement plan and all staff work together to make sure that pupils make the best possible progress.

You have ensured that the issues for improvement from the last inspection have been fully addressed. The quality of teaching has continued to improve. Teachers have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. The work in the pupils' books shows that they are set tasks which challenge them. Pupils are clear about how well they are doing and how they can improve their work. However, rightly so, you acknowledge that teachers do not make use of questioning highly effectively to deepen pupils' understanding further.

Assessment information and the work in pupils' books, including in English and mathematics, show that current pupils make consistently strong progress.

This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational

needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The proportions attaining expected standards by the end of each key stage are above national average figures. Pupils in Year 1 achieve highly in the national phonics screening check.

In the early years, children excel from their starting points because they clearly enjoy the well-planned learning opportunities on offer to them and acquire new skills quickly. The focus on language acquisition, teachers' high expectations and opportunities to learn through experiences ensure that children get off to a successful start. They are well prepared for the challenges of Year 1.

Pupils' behaviour, their attitudes to learning and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are also clear strengths of the school. The school strongly promotes British values, especially through the curriculum and its Christian ethos.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and are very proud to be part of the school community. They are polite and well behaved and show respect to other pupils and adults. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good and they work hard and apply themselves well in lessons. They said that teachers support them well. There are occasions, however, when pupils misspell words in their writing. You have plans in place to address this.

Parents are happy with the school and appreciate the many activities on offer. Comments included, 'We are delighted to see our children growing in confidence and making great progress as they move through the school' and 'The children look forward to going to school and learning new and exciting things.' Parents spoke about the many experiences the children have during their time at school. Experiences provided include themed days, such as donkey rides and ice-creams during a seaside focus, maypole dancing and museum trips as well as opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. As you explained, the aim of these days is to expand the pupils' knowledge and develop their love of learning. You also said it is to 'make every day a memory'.

Although parents are very positive about the school, attendance remains an issue. Trends show it to be just below average. There are reasons for some absences and you are working effectively with families who find it difficult to get their children to school every day. Although you have robust systems in place to check why pupils are absent, you and the governors recognise that the importance of good attendance is not stressed as highly as it could be.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governing body afford a high priority to keeping pupils safe and there is a strong culture of safeguarding across school. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders ensure that checks on staff are completed thoroughly before they start employment. This is systematically recorded on the single central record, which is checked for compliance regularly by a member of the governing body.

All staff and governors receive comprehensive training and make good use of this knowledge to keep pupils safe. You have well-developed systems in place for staff to refer

any concerns that they have about a pupil's welfare. You are tenacious in following up concerns regarding the safety and well-being of pupils. Record-keeping is of good quality.

Pupils told me that standards of behaviour in school are good and that there is little bullying. They also told me that they are taught how to keep themselves safe in different situations. Parents I spoke to and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were confident the school is a safe place.

Inspection findings

- One of the aspects of the school's work we looked at concerned the number of pupils who reach the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics. This was because trends at the end of key stage 1 show that the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard was below the national average. Some pupils were not making the progress they should have been to get to the higher standard. You were aware this was an area to tackle.
- The English and mathematics curriculum have been reviewed to ensure that learning at the higher level is taught well. Professional development has taken place, so staff are secure in assessing pupils' work at the higher levels. Pupils are targeted even more carefully to make sure that no child is at risk of falling behind. You are a leading literacy teacher and you have ensured that staff have secure subject knowledge. The books reflect that challenges are built in for every ability group. The pupils say they find all work equally challenging. As a result, a greater number of pupils currently in school are exceeding age-related expectations. However, teachers do not make use of questioning effectively enough to deepen pupils' understanding further.
- Recently, the teaching of mathematics has been re-evaluated. Mathematics has been a priority for the school over the past few years. Professional development has taken place for the entire staff, and higher expectations are set for staff and pupils. The impact of this shows the teaching of mathematics is now strong, and staff have secure subject knowledge. There has been a much greater focus on the application of skills and problem-solving. Problem-solving tasks, involving real-life contexts, have also been a major focus across the whole school. Mathematics is well led, with guidance for staff and rigorous monitoring.
- We also agreed to look at the extent to which pupils have more opportunities to practise their writing skills across different subjects. This is because assessment information indicates that pupils do not do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. Evidence from the inspection shows that writing is well planned across the curriculum. Pupils have experience of different types of writing, such as diary entries and poetry, as well as writing about facts and events.
- We also looked in the books to see if the pupils apply their writing skills across different subjects to the same standard as they achieve in English lessons. Work in pupils' books shows that they apply their grammar and punctuation skills well.

Pupils are taught to check their work carefully. One pupil said, 'I like reading and writing. I always read my work through to see it makes sense.' However, as you rightly recognise, not enough attention is paid to the accuracy of pupils' spellings.

Consequently, not all pupils make as much progress in writing as they should.

- You work well with the parents of pupils who have poor attendance. However, you recognise that this is an area for development as the importance of good attendance is not stressed as highly as it could be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the accuracy of pupils' spelling improves, and teachers consistently address errors so that pupils do not repeat mistakes
- teachers use questioning highly effectively to deepen pupils' understanding further
- the profile of attendance is raised and results in good attendance for all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Townsend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together, we visited every class, including those in the early years. We looked at the pupils' books and observed learning. I held meetings with you and other school leaders as well as with three governors. I held a telephone discussion with your school improvement adviser. I reviewed a wide range of documentation, including your plans for improvement, your school website, minutes from governors' meetings and information relating to your arrangements for safeguarding pupils. I considered the views of parents by analysing the 34 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and by considering a wide range of parents' comments on free-text. I took the views of staff into account by analysing 10 responses to the staff survey.