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Miss Alice Eeles
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Eeles

Short inspection of Barnes Voluntary Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2019, 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. In April 2016, the school joined Link Academy Trust and you were appointed as headteacher at the start of September 2018.

You have settled quickly into your role and understand what needs to be done to improve the school further. The school is held in high regard by parents and carers. Those who responded to Ofsted's online survey Parent View would all recommend the school. One parent's comment to me, which summarised many, was, 'The school is amazing, and my children are so happy here.' Staff share a very strong commitment to wanting the best for every child. The strong sense of team spirit among staff ensures morale is very high in the school. A member of staff who spoke with me shared the view of many, 'In all the schools I have worked in, I have never been so well supported.'

Pupils echo the views of staff and parents. They say that school is fun and that they enjoy learning. Strong links to other cultures from around the world permeate the school. An example of this is that pupils in all year groups share their learning with another primary school in Istanbul. This develops pupils' cultural and religious understanding. As a result of the strong provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, pupils' understanding of British values is well developed. Trips and visits enhance pupils' experiences well. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 were eager to share with me how the visit to 'Kent's Cavern' helped them understand life in the prehistoric era.

Pupils' behaviour is of a high standard. They demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and attend well. In every classroom I visited, there was a positive vibe and a real buzz of learning taking place.

The governing body has undergone many changes recently. As a result, some governors do not yet have the experience to ensure that their plans are fully executed, or that actions have the required impact on raising standards. Although governors are supported by more experienced governors from across the trust and are developing their skills, it is too early to see any discernible impact on their work. Governance requires more time to become fully effective.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. During the inspection, pupils told me they feel safe at the school. This view was supported by parents and staff who responded to Ofsted's surveys.

Relationships between staff and pupils are nurturing. This gives pupils the confidence to raise any concerns or worries they may have. Pupils are adamant that bullying does not happen. For example, one pupil told me: 'It just does not happen here.'

All staff have received the required level of training and demonstrate a strong understanding of their responsibilities. During the inspection, I sampled a selection of staff randomly from across the school and looked at their understanding of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and female genital mutilation. All staff who spoke with me were confident in being able to identify any signs of pupils at risk and knew how to raise concerns. Work with external agencies is strong. This includes on the care for those pupils who are looked after.

Inspection findings

- At our initial meeting, we agreed three key lines of enquiry. First, I wanted to check how effectively leaders ensure that early reading skills are built upon and further developed. This is because, for the last two years, pupils in Year 1 have not achieved as well as other pupils nationally in the phonics check. Following the 2018 outcomes, leaders have ensured a strategic approach to the development of early reading. During the inspection, I listened to several pupils read. The level of challenge of the texts that the most-able pupils are reading is particularly high. For example, I listened to one pupil from Year 2 read 'Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban' exceptionally well. This text is above what would be typically expected for that age.
- Planned reading sessions are structured well and ensure that pupils acquire relevant reading skills, such as inference and deduction. Scrutiny of pupils' reading journals indicated their ability to comprehend what they are reading and give thoughtful, detailed responses to the texts they read. Reading journals and school assessment information indicate that pupils are making strong progress in their reading.

- Next, we focused on the quality of writing at the school. This was chosen because pupils' outcomes at the end of key stages 1 and 2 have been below the national average. Leaders recognise that historical standards in writing have not been good enough. One of your first actions as headteacher was to introduce plans to improve progress in writing. The response to your expectations has been effective, particularly in key stage 1.
- Together, we observed the teaching of writing and, with the middle leader for English, we examined a selection of pupils' books from across year groups. In the early years provision, carefully planned activities provide children with experiences to use their phonic knowledge to identify and write initial sounds. This means that they get a good start in their development of early writing skills.
- In key stage 1, pupils make strong progress. Evidence in pupils' English books shows that teachers plan a sequence of learning that challenges the pupils and promotes high expectations. As a result, pupils from a range of starting points develop their skills in becoming mature writers.
- In key stage 2, careful thought and planning have gone into the choosing of texts and topics to engage pupils from different groups. This approach has started to have a positive impact upon pupils' outcomes. Despite this, however, pupils' books show that pupils are not yet accurately applying punctuation and grammar in their writing. Pupils make basic errors which demonstrate a lack of understanding and this limits the effectiveness of their writing. Consequently, pupils' progress in key stage 2 is hampered.
- My final line of enquiry sought to establish how far current key stage 2 pupils, including the most able, are making good progress and achieving well in mathematics. This is because pupils' progress in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has been below the national average for the past three years. Because of this, leaders have identified mathematics as an improvement priority.
- Pupils told me that they enjoy mathematics, and that the tasks they complete are mostly challenging. Classrooms we visited and scrutiny of pupils' work books show that pupils of all abilities are making secure progress in calculation and number. However, teachers do not always plan adequately for a broad range of mathematical concepts or move children on swiftly enough. This hampers pupils' knowledge and skills and does not encourage all pupils to grapple with their learning. As a result, this limits the progress that pupils make in areas other than calculation and number.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors continue to develop their roles, so that they are knowledgeable and able to provide effective challenge to hold leaders to account
- across key stage 2, teachers enable pupils to use and apply grammar and punctuation skills consistently in their written work
- teachers adjust pupils' learning more swiftly and plan more opportunities for pupils to learn a broader range of mathematical skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of Link Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matt Middlemore
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the chief executive officer of the trust, other leaders and the chair of the local governing body. I considered the 13 responses to Parent View, including the free-text comments. I spoke with pupils formally and informally during the day. I also considered the 11 responses to the staff survey and 21 responses to the pupil survey. We observed teaching and learning jointly. I looked at a range of pupils' work in their exercise books, and work displayed around the school and in their classrooms. I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the single central record, and your school self-evaluation and improvement plan.