

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Craig Robertson  
Headteacher  
Berrycoombe School  
Berrycoombe Vale  
Bodmin  
Cornwall  
PL31 2PH

Dear Mr Robertson

### **Short inspection of Berrycoombe School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 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 September 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

You have led the school through a period of significant change since the previous inspection. In particular, the school has experienced significant staffing changes. However, with the support of your senior leaders and governors, you have successfully steered the school through this challenging time and managed the necessary changes well. Through well-focused and effective professional development, you are now addressing the academic challenges facing the school. Prior to this, school priorities, such as improving pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills, were temporarily overshadowed by the need to train new and inexperienced staff and establish effective pastoral care and support for pupils. This led to a dip in standards reflected most recently in the 2016 key stage 1 and 2 end-of-year assessments. However, staffing is now stable and teaching is typically good throughout the school. Consequently, this year, pupils are accelerating the progress they make in lessons as you and your staff provide pupils with a good all-round education.

You have continued to gain a strong reputation within the locality for being able to effectively provide for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Since the previous inspection, the school's popularity has seen an increase in the number of pupils transferring from other schools. You and your staff are well prepared for the challenges this sometimes brings. Through your well-honed induction procedures, pupils and their parents are welcomed and quickly settle into school. You and your staff work closely with other partners and agencies, such as the educational psychologist, to reduce pupils' anxiety and

provide effective pastoral support. Academically, many pupils start school with skills and aptitudes to learning that are well below national expectations. However, you are effective in turning pupils into successful learners, even if this means sometimes temporarily lowering academic expectations in order to address the negative influences that are barriers to pupils' learning. To this end, you have structurally changed the school in order to accommodate the pastoral as well as academic learning needs of pupils. For example, this year, pupils in Year 1 have been divided into two classes. This is allowing a more favourable staff to pupil ratio and a more gradual transition from the early years curriculum to the key stage 1 curriculum. This strategy has been well received by the parents who spoke with me. One parent summed up the views of the majority when she said, 'The school has made such an effort with our pupils' well-being. We know they have it covered academically.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders have successfully maintained a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. They ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are compliant with current regulations and are fit for purpose. Staff are regularly trained in ways to keep pupils safe. They possess a comprehensive knowledge of the pupils in their care and are particularly vigilant to spot any child who might be at risk from harm. Records show examples of how leaders take swift action to address safeguarding concerns. The school is particularly vigilant in monitoring pupils' absence. Senior leaders work very closely with pupils and their families who sometimes find attending school a challenge. The school maintains good communications with parents in order to keep children safe and to stop issues escalating unnecessarily. Staff work closely with external agencies, when needed, to ensure that pupils are well looked after and their needs are fully met. Pupils who spoke with me said that they feel safe in school at all times. Pupils know there is an adult in the school to whom they can turn if anything is worrying them. They also said that some pupils do not always behave well in school. However, pupils were quick to acknowledge that teachers deal with inappropriate behaviour quickly and effectively when it does occur. Behaviour records are carefully maintained and monitored by senior leaders.

### **Inspection findings**

- One of my key lines of enquiry in helping me to decide whether the school remained good was to find out how well the school had addressed the area for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. To this end I looked for evidence of how assessment information is being used by you and your staff to ensure that all pupils, especially the most able, are set sufficiently challenging work. Assessment procedures are fully embedded throughout the school and used consistently well to ensure that all pupils and key groups, such as disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make progress in lessons that is at least in line with national expectations. The most recent assessment data clearly shows that nearly all pupils are making accelerated progress in

acquiring their reading, writing and mathematics skills. You have established an efficient system to quickly identify and provide for the learning needs of pupils new to the school. You work closely with a wide range of educational partners and agencies in order to provide for the broad and often complex needs of pupils. You also work closely with children's social services to support your most vulnerable pupils.

- The most recent data you shared with me on current pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics indicates that most pupils are making accelerated progress towards achieving their end-of-year targets. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are tracked as discrete groups. This allows you to maintain a clear understanding of how well these pupils are learning. It also highlights what needs to be done to support pupils who might need to catch up or benefit from further challenge in order to achieve their best. Each half term you provide your staff and governors with an accurate summary of pupils' learning and progress. Teachers use this information appropriately to help them plan the next steps in pupils' learning. You acknowledge that currently the most able pupils are not tracked and monitored with the same rigour as other groups of pupils.
- You and your staff are committed to creating a positive learning environment where each and every pupil is able to reach their full potential. This approach was endorsed by the many parents who spoke with me at the beginning of my visit. These were some of the overwhelming positive sentiments from parents who spoke with me: 'We love that the school encourages every child to do their best,' and 'Teachers celebrate each child's success as they progress. They never give up on our children!'
- Any actual or potential obstacles to learning are quickly identified and, if not fully removed, ameliorated to provide the best possible learning conditions for pupils to engage once more with learning. You are particularly pleased that pupils' learning and ownership of their progress has, this year, shifted from the teacher to the pupil. This is the reason why the majority of pupils are now making accelerated progress in lessons. The few pupils who are not making expected progress (some pupils who have special educational needs and some who speak English as an additional language) are all receiving carefully planned intervention support. Teaching assistants are well trained. They provide good support to individual pupils and small groups, and have the freedom to adapt the work they do to best suit the learning needs of pupils.
- Another line of enquiry looked at how effectively pupils are being supported to develop their writing skills. You have rightly identified this as a key priority in your school improvement plan and are making sure that pupils' progress rates and targets are at least in line with national expectations. A focus on storytelling is being used successfully to support pupils' writing. A professional dialogue regularly takes place between your assessment leader and teachers to review the work in pupils' books. This provides you with comprehensive information on pupils' learning and progress. Furthermore, teachers speak regularly with pupils, on an individual basis, about their work

to agree on how they could improve even further. They are confident that their assessment of pupils' work is accurate. I found many good examples in books where pupils had acted on the advice of their teachers to demonstrate their improved writing skills. The most recent checks on pupils' learning clearly show that increasingly more pupils are working at a greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.

- A further line of enquiry found that many more pupils are making better progress in learning to read, especially in key stage 1. Effective engagement with parents has led to approximately two thirds of pupils now reading at least three times a week at home. The school library is a busy place, especially at lunchtimes. I was particularly impressed with the structural changes to the library that allows pupils to access the resource directly from the playground. The library is managed with great care and enthusiasm. As a result, you have witnessed an increase in the use of the library including pupils who were formerly identified as 'reluctant readers'. Pupils who read to me during the inspection did so willingly, with confidence and enthusiasm. I found pupils from key stage 1 were able to use their phonics knowledge to attempt tricky words like 'walk' and 'through'. A pupil from Year 2 read with fluency and was able to talk knowledgeably about his non-fiction book.
- Another line of enquiry looked at how well senior leaders, including governors, are provided with sufficient, accurate and evaluative information regarding the work of the school. Governors confirmed to me that they enjoy a good working relationship with you and other senior leaders. Governors told me that they are confident about the way they gain information on the work of the school. You keep governors regularly updated on the work of the school through face-to-face meetings and detailed written reports. Through learning walks, talking with pupils and reviewing their books, governors are also able to see for themselves the progress that pupils are making. Minutes of governors' meetings confirm that they hold the school effectively to account by regularly questioning you and other senior leaders about the work you do. As a result, governors possess an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Recent changes in governor personnel have not weakened their effectiveness. Indeed, governors are highly motivated to improve their practice. They carry out their duties with commitment and professionalism. Governors acknowledge that they do not currently monitor the impact of the professional training and development of staff to ensure that the quality of teaching and overall provision within the school continues to improve.
- My final line of enquiry was about attendance. The school regularly monitors attendance data including for key groups. Patterns are analysed and rigorously followed up. Historic low attendance (due mainly to the persistent absence of a few pupils and some with complex medical needs) continues to be rigorously addressed. The school manages very challenging pupils well and this has resulted in falling rates of exclusion. Strong, pastoral support provided by the school is appreciated by parents. Current attendance information is now in line with the national average. This is a significant improvement on previous years.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the monitoring of the most able pupils' learning and progress is carried out with the same rigour as it is for other groups of pupils, in order to help them achieve the higher levels they are capable of making
- they monitor the professional training and development of staff to ensure that the quality of teaching and overall provision within the school continues to improve and provides value for money.

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

Yours sincerely

David Edwards  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met regularly with you as part of a professional dialogue. I also met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair. I held meetings with senior leaders, teachers and teaching assistants. I also spoke informally with other members of staff. Together we undertook observations of learning in lessons. We spoke with pupils about their work and examined pupils' work, focusing on writing and presentation. I heard some children read to me. Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents, including the school's website, published performance information and a summary of its self-evaluation. I spoke with 15 parents at the start of the day and also took into account five responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.