

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



10 December 2015

Miss Kate Woodhouse
Headteacher
St Nicolas Church of England Aided Infant School
Portsmouth Road
Guildford
Surrey
GU2 4YD

Dear Miss Woodhouse

Short inspection of St Nicolas Church of England Aided Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 17 November 2015, 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 March 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You ensure that the personal development and welfare of pupils is at the heart of the school's work. You extend this sense of care to teachers and other staff in what one staff member describes as a 'wonderful community'. As a result, strong relationships prevail and underpin a culture of continuous self-improvement. Right from the start, teachers build enthusiastic attitudes and a thirst for learning in children. Lessons capture pupils' interests well. The St Nicolas' core values, such as kindness, permeate all aspects of school life. Pupils are rightly proud of their school and how they care for each other.

You have sustained the high standards recognised at the last inspection. Pupils continue to achieve well at the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics. Across the school, pupils of different abilities make good progress and many achieve standards above those expected for their age by the end of Year 2. Progress in mathematics is rapid. This is because teachers match tasks well to pupils' starting points. You have rightly promoted the importance of coming to school every day and have encouraged parents to book holidays outside term-time. Consequently, attendance remains high and above the national average.

You have a clear understanding of the school's performance and use this information to make well-judged changes to teaching. You correctly recognise the need to increase boys' achievement in writing and raise pupils' attainment in phonics (understanding the sounds that letters make). In 2015, pupils' attainment in the

Year 1 phonics check fell to below the national average. Your school development plan is focused accurately on securing improvements in these areas.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors identified a need to extend pupils' wider understanding of different cultures and customs (for example, by establishing closer links with schools in other countries) and to ensure that, where worksheets are used, they provide pupils with as many opportunities as possible to practise fluency in writing on a range of topics, both factual and imaginative. You have addressed both these matters effectively:

- Pupils have a wide understanding of different cultures and customs. They learn about other countries such as China, Mexico and India. Pupils are developing their understanding of other faiths and visit different places of worship such as the local synagogue and mosque. You have established meaningful links with other countries and share these along with pupils' own varied backgrounds to increase pupils' understanding of differences and to promote tolerance.
- Pupils of all ages have regular opportunities to practise fluency in writing. Pupils write for a range of reasons that include sharing information and telling stories. Lessons in religious education, science and history provide further occasions to write at length.

Safeguarding is effective.

You make pupils' safety and welfare everyone's priority. Staff know pupils well and show vigilance and diligence in their care. Governors check routinely that arrangements for safeguarding are followed correctly. Parents are confident that the school endeavours to keep their children safe. Many describe it as a 'nurturing environment' and rightly recognise that the small size of the school and strong relationships ensure a focus on individual needs. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and up to date with the most recent requirements. You communicate these well to parents, and share approaches with your local church, to ensure a consistency of care. Pupils feel safe in school. They know how to stay safe inside and outside school because they learn about safety in lessons and through experience. For example, a pupil explained how to stay safe on school trips, 'firstly by listening carefully'. As a result, pupils have a growing understanding of, and sense of responsibility for, their own safety.

Inspection findings

- You are a committed and reflective leader. You regularly review the impact of your work on pupils' learning and make appropriate changes to improve outcomes for pupils. You work closely with teachers and bring about improvements to teaching through frequent, constructive feedback. Consequently, teachers are similarly thoughtful and strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils.

- You have a well-focused school development plan. It sets out what will happen, and at what time, to address areas for improvement that you have correctly identified using school performance information. For example, raising attainment in phonics is a current priority. A new leader of phonics has recently introduced some important changes to the teaching of phonics. There is some detail in the plan about how you will measure the impact of these actions. However, expectations for pupils' progress in phonics for each year group are still not sufficiently clear.
- You have wisely taken steps to develop and distribute leadership responsibilities. Teachers embrace these opportunities, benefit from training and contribute effectively to school improvement. Recently, the early years leader has worked closely with advisers from the local authority and the diocese to improve teaching and learning in the Reception class. As a result, children now participate in a wider range of activities across all the areas of learning. In particular, there is a greater focus on developing early reading and writing skills.
- Children make good progress from their different starting points in the Reception class. This is because adults talk to children and question them well to extend their thinking. Consequently, children are keen to share their knowledge and ideas. One child in the sandpit, pretending to be a palaeontologist, confidently explained, 'This is a T-Rex and it eats meat.' Nevertheless, rates of progress vary across different areas of learning. For example, although children achieve well in reading and writing, achievement is not as strong as it is in communication and language.
- Teachers have made some valuable changes to phonics teaching. Teachers group pupils to provide activities that match their abilities better. In the Reception class, the teacher selected some children to practise writing sounds that they found difficult. The teacher then challenged one child who wrote two words correctly to try to write a sentence. However, these changes are very new and it is too soon to see their impact.
- Workbooks show that pupils have regular opportunities to write at length. Different groups of pupils, including boys, are making good progress in writing. Pupils with disabilities and special educational needs are making similar progress to their classmates because expectations of them are high and support is effective.
- The curriculum is stimulating and serves pupils' interests well. Pupils are highly motivated by topics such as 'superheroes' and 'castles'. Extra-curricular activities provide further exciting learning opportunities in drama, Italian, dance and sports. Pupils demonstrate their enthusiasm for learning with their exemplary attitudes and high levels of attendance.
- You have strengthened opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn about other cultures and their own roles in society. The school sponsors two children from other countries and pupils are proud to raise funds for them, choosing how they do this as a class. A child from Peru and a child from Kenya help to show pupils what life is like in other places and to learn about British values such as mutual respect and democracy.

- The St Nicolas' core values greatly enhance pupils' personal development. Pupils are keen to share this learning and how it has made them think. One pupil noted, 'Honesty is actually quite hard to do sometimes.' Values also support pupils in behaving very well. Incidents of poor behaviour are extremely rare. Pupils know to say, 'Stop, I don't like it when...', or ask one of the Year 2 buddies if they have a problem at playtime. Pupils note that it is most unusual for you to raise your voice – one pupil is adamant that this has not happened since 2011! Parents and governors are equally positive about the impact of the school's values.
- Governors have made changes to increase their effectiveness. They have recently completed an audit of their skills and reorganised their committees to improve their oversight of the school's work. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and use this to challenge and support leaders. Governors have made some visits to evaluate the impact of the school development plan. However, they recognise that these visits are not sufficient and are currently refining the way that they check the progress of your plan.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should:

- set ambitious expectations for pupils' progress in phonics for each year group so that pupils' attainment matches or exceeds the national average.
- ensure that governors effectively evaluate the impact of the school development plan.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Dulon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the phonics leader, teachers, five governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the Diocese of Guildford. I spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone. We observed teaching and learning in all four classes. We scrutinised pupils' work together. I observed pupils' behaviour at playtime and around the school. I spoke to pupils about their experiences and views of school. I took account of 94 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and nine responses to the staff questionnaire. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan, safeguarding checks, and policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.