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9 February 2016

Mrs Tina Daniel
Executive Headteacher
St Michael and All Angels CofE Infant School
High Street
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Dear Mrs Daniel

Short inspection of St Michael and All Angels CofE Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 14 January 2016, 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.

You and the head of learning have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your school is a happy one, where pupils fly in from the playground in the morning full of enthusiasm for the day ahead. Parents used the word 'nurture' to describe the caring, friendly atmosphere at St Michael's. They told me how much they appreciate the way that staff go out of their way to do everything they can for the pupils.

This clear emphasis on pupils' personal and social development is apparent from first stepping foot in the school. Pupils learn in a supportive, safe environment, where adults encourage them to be themselves, appreciate and respect one another and play their part as members of the school community. The 'Forest Values' are at the forefront of the curriculum and underpin everyone's approach, including the pupils themselves. Values such as friendship, openness, trust and endurance are taken very seriously by the pupils. Pupils clearly know the 'Forest Values' are there to build important qualities that will help them to become responsible citizens of the future. One parent told me about a child describing a moment at home as being an example of 'good stewardship' and how impressed she was by the child's understanding.

Alongside your commitment to fostering pupils' personal, spiritual and social development lies an equally strong determination that pupils will do well academically. You check pupils' progress carefully at half-termly intervals, on an

individual basis. You have adapted this to align with the government's changes to the curriculum and assessment arrangements in Key Stage 1 and have created a manageable system. It is clear, from my visit, that you have tackled successfully the two areas for development from the last inspection. Pupils' books show that the school's marking policy is used consistently and pupils are involved more actively in their learning. They answer questions enthusiastically and show that they can think for themselves. This was particularly evident when I observed learning in Years 1 and 2 with your head of learning.

When pupils leave at the end of Year 2, they do so with a strong foundation in reading and mathematics. Attainment has been significantly above average in these two areas over recent years. You and your staff have improved pupils' attainment in writing since the last inspection and this has been sustained. Pupils' writing is above average but not quite as strong as their attainment in reading and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils, though relatively few in number, achieve very well. Their attainment compares favourably with those pupils nationally who come from non-disadvantaged backgrounds. At St Michael's, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds leave with the skills that they need to make a good start in their junior school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and senior leaders take safeguarding seriously and are highly committed to keeping pupils safe. They make sure that all necessary checks are carried out to confirm that all who come into contact with pupils are suitable. Arrangements for training staff in safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding asks leaders pertinent questions to assure herself, and the governing body, that the school's arrangements are secure. During the inspection, a discussion between this governor and a new member of staff, to check safeguarding, showed incisive questioning on the part of the governor and demonstrated that leaders' training equips new staff well.

Governors have considered the Prevent strategy and discussed with senior leaders how best to meet this duty with pupils in the infant years. They speak knowledgeably about how the school's ethos and curriculum fosters the sort of qualities and attitudes that pupils need to make the right decisions, to protect themselves from being drawn into things that are wrong and potentially harmful.

Inspection findings

- You, the head of learning and governors take the stance that there are always things that can be improved at St Michael's. This belief has created a school with a culture where there is always room for improvement and nothing stands still. The determination to look forward and seek things that could be even better spreads across staff at all levels. It is clear that everyone plays their part in making life at St Michael's enjoyable, interesting and exciting for your pupils.
- You draw on research findings to keep the school's provision vibrant, and identify what can be learnt from the latest thinking. Wisely, you do not introduce new initiatives without giving careful thought as to whether these

are right for the pupils. New ideas, such as the different approach to monitoring teaching and the new arrangements for tracking each pupil's progress are piloted carefully and reviewed before they go 'live'.

- As St Michael's is part of a federation of three schools, you capitalise wisely on the opportunities this provides. Staff work together closely to moderate pupils' work, for example, or benefit from training. The work you are currently doing to promote 'mastery' in mathematics is a good example of teachers coming together to share expertise across the federation.
- Staff questionnaires show that staff are fully supportive of the school's leadership. They are clearly happy and proud to be a member of the team at St Michael's. Teaching is monitored carefully through a variety of means. The records from your observations of lessons have a greater focus on teaching than pupils' learning. Early examples from this new approach included some 'broad-brush' statements about learning. More detail on the peaks and dips in learning, for different groups, would identify helpful pointers for improvement, for both leaders and teachers.
- Governors provide a healthy degree of challenge for senior leaders. They have established effective ways of finding out about the school's work for themselves. They follow up key points from the local authority's visits, and subsequent reports, to check how these are being actioned. They are also familiar with the broad messages coming through from leaders' scrutiny of pupils' work or visits to classrooms to check learning. What this amounts to is that governors know the school well and talk knowledgeably about current priorities and next steps in the drive to make the school outstanding.
- The approach to planning in the early years is more informal than it should be. Staff are knowledgeable about individual children but a lot of information about the next steps in children's learning and development is held 'in the head'. It is therefore difficult for leaders to check that information about the children's learning and development is used to full effect to plan their next steps, day by day and week by week.
- More work is needed to identify and monitor the children who enter Reception with a good early grounding in the key areas of development, particularly literacy and mathematics, to make sure that they are building successfully on their skills and exceeding the early learning goals, if they are capable of doing so.
- Senior leaders and governors have rightly questioned why writing is not quite as strong as reading and mathematics. Governors pointed to the lower proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 3 last year as the reason, showing their good knowledge of the picture presented by teachers' assessments.
- Looking at pupils' books together, you and the head of learning were quick to identify some aspects that are holding back more-able pupils from showing their full potential. Some are not writing as much as they could in lessons, possibly because time for independent writing comes towards the end of sessions and they run out of time. Teachers plan well to develop pupils' skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar and work becomes progressively more demanding as the weeks go on. This is giving pupils a very good grounding. However, opportunities to write longer pieces independently are not as evident.

- Parents are very pleased with the school's work. Those to whom I spoke had nothing but praise and admiration for the work that you and your staff do. They cited numerous examples of staff going the extra mile, being available should queries or concerns arise, or setting up extra help for pupils who struggle with aspects of their learning and development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children's learning and development in the early years is planned carefully, and next steps are clearly identified based on what staff know about children, particularly those who are capable of exceeding the early learning goals
- leaders' monitoring of teaching focuses in more detail and depth on the quality and effectiveness of pupils' learning, including that of different groups.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Winchester, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the head of learning, a group of governors and, separately, the governor who holds responsibility for safeguarding. I observed a meeting that this governor held with a new member of staff, to check safeguarding arrangements. I observed you and the head of learning reviewing pupils' writing in a sample of books from Years 1 and 2. The head of learning and I observed pupils' learning in three classes. One of these involved focusing on a pupil from a disadvantaged background and a more-able pupil to check the quality of their learning. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including documents related to safeguarding, monitoring of teaching and the most recent local authority report. I spoke to pupils informally before school and during the day and met several parents in the playground before the start of school. Responses from Parent View and questionnaires from pupils and staff were analysed.