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Mrs Hilary Tyreman
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Dear Mrs Tyreman

Short inspection of St Mary's C of E Primary School, Penzance

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your school is now a vibrant and cheerful place to work and learn. Pupils' progress is rapid and the quality of education for those currently at the school is good. Prior to September 2015, this was not always the case. Your continued determination, perseverance and tenacious approach is the key reason that the school remains good. Pupils' progress has increased markedly and they are receiving a good quality of education.

You have successfully addressed the legacy of underachievement caused by a decline in the quality of teaching. Current governors are committed to improving the school's performance further. They hold you and other leaders to account rigorously and play a critical role in monitoring the school's performance. Leaders have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and areas to improve. The school's capacity to improve is strong. As a result, outcomes for current pupils have significantly improved and they make good progress across all year groups. All involved in the school hold an uncompromising drive and resolve to provide the very best education for each pupil.

The changes you have made to leadership and governance have undoubtedly resulted in much stronger performance than in 2015. You now have the right leaders in the right positions. You and your new team are moving forward confidently in pursuit of further improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. All those spoken to during the inspection understand that, above all else,

you must now maintain the momentum and rigour shown in the last four terms to ensure that the new ways of working that you have introduced have maximum impact going forward.

Your root and branch review of leadership and what went wrong following the dip in pupils' performance in 2015 provided a 'watershed moment'. Pupils' progress and performance were at odds with the typically good rates that they are now making in your school. You and your leadership team have implemented the fundamental systems and processes needed to quickly address the issues and raise the overall quality of teaching and learning. Clearer lines of accountability ensure that senior leaders are able to exert greater influence over the quality of teaching. Work in pupils' books indicates that their current progress is at least good; it is sometimes better than this for disadvantaged pupils. However, while the improvements in pupils' learning across the school provide tangible evidence of your success, they have not yet led to improvements in published results.

Safeguarding is effective.

All involved in the school community are committed to keeping pupils safe. You make sure that all necessary checks are made to confirm that those who wish to work with children are suitable. Training for safeguarding and child protection is up to date, regular and welcomed, enabling staff and governors to fully discharge their duties. You ensure that more staff than necessary are trained, illustrating your deep commitment to this aspect of the school's work. Pupils and parents are confident that issues are followed up. Pupils are knowledgeable about matters of safety through activities planned in the curriculum. For example, routine activities such as reading Fireman Sam stories are used well to reinforce aspects of fire safety.

Your strong emphasis on pupils' personal development promotes their positive behaviour, with respect and courtesy as the norm. De-escalation strategies are emphasised through your anti-bullying and behaviour approaches. Effective links are evident with outside agencies to cater for vulnerable pupils from the very youngest age. All staff are aware of the procedures for passing on concerns via the 'green form'. You ensure that all are aware and happy that actions are appropriate and completed adequately in the way you report back to adults following referrals. Your strong commitment to pupils' safety is demonstrated through your plans and work on 'the digital curriculum'. Your engagement with staff, pupils, parents and governors has significantly enhanced this area. Overall, the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and of a high quality.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, together we focused on how well lower-ability pupils were being supported in their reading. We also examined how well middle-ability pupils were being challenged in their writing. In addition, we explored the expectations being set for disadvantaged pupils and how well the good start children receive in the early years was being built upon as they moved through the school.

- Following the disappointment of reading outcomes in 2015, your thorough analysis has resulted in a cultural shift at the school. Training, combined with closer monitoring and the tracking of pupils' progress, is bearing fruit. When listening to lower-attaining pupils read it was clear that pupils are enthusiastic about reading, they read regularly and feel well supported in school to make good progress. However, some lower-attaining pupils still do not use their phonic skills enough in their reading and writing or when spelling more complicated words.
- Pupils in Year 1 read with clear enunciation and use their knowledge of phonics to decode unfamiliar words confidently. Lower-ability pupils in Year 3 demonstrated some competent reading skills using the 'basic mechanics' of reading. They segment more complicated sounds capably and show good skills of inference and deduction as a result of teaching that focuses closely on the development of language. Across key stage 2 nearly 90% of pupils have made the progress in reading that would typically be expected of them by the end of the year.
- Your adaptations to the curriculum across the school are engaging boys more in their writing and helping them make good progress. Parents recognise these positive changes. The youngest children in early years are fired up by the dinosaur topic and write interesting questions that they would like to research further. Older pupils talk knowledgeably about their writing successes and what they still find challenging such as 'parentheses using modal verbs' or 'active and passive voice'. Some aspects of spelling and weaker handwriting are still holding a few boys back from attaining as well as they could.
- Teaching is providing a clear structure for developing pupils' understanding of the purpose, organisation and features of different styles of writing. Pupils use their good knowledge to create clear writing for a range of purposes, for example when crafting instructions on 'how to mummify an Egyptian'. When the purpose and organisation of a text are taught alongside the technical aspects of writing composition, pupils' progress is rapid. Occasionally, teaching does not emphasise the grammatical and spelling conventions strongly enough in pupils' independent writing or when writing in other subjects. Nevertheless, over 70% of pupils in Years 3 to 6 are making better than expected progress in developing their writing skills.
- Following a thorough review of the impact of pupil premium spending, all staff share your vision of what you all want to achieve as a school. Teaching is therefore typically characterised by high expectations, strong relationships with pupils and happy, productive classroom environments. Your approach to the curriculum is benefiting all pupils but especially disadvantaged pupils. The observations we made during my visit, and the pupils' books we reviewed, show that disadvantaged pupils are making strong gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They are learning to be even more resilient when faced with trickier tasks and to be more reflective about what they have learned – skills that will serve them well as life-long learners. The progress of disadvantaged pupils, which was too slow in 2015, and for some in 2016, is now markedly quicker.
- Children in the early years get off to a cracking start with their education. Close links and shared planning between the pre-school and nursery ensure a smooth

transition and continual progress for all children. The strong focus on developing early language and communication skills is equipping children with the understanding and foundations needed for their future success.

- On our learning walk, we particularly noted pupils' accuracy in their knowledge of phonics. Teachers and other adults were technically precise with their delivery so that pupils confidently identified sounds that do not conform to traditional phonetic patterns, such as the 'a' in 'want'. Such approaches are ensuring that pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check has risen to above the national average for the last two years. This year, all pupils are on track to reach the expected standard in the phonics check. Therefore, the firm foundations on which to build pupils' future success in reading are being secured.
- Children's solid start to school is capitalised on well by school leaders. Systems to drive improvement are extremely tight and coherent. Actions identified in the school development plan are derived from carefully targeted monitoring of pupils' learning over time. Training programmes match precisely the school's developmental priorities. All procedures are underpinned by clear and tangible targets, embedded as part of the staff performance management process. Together, this collective package is harnessing everyone's efforts. All know what is required of them, whom they are responsible to and what they are working on together to continue with the rapid progress currently at the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- lower ability pupils' reading and writing skills are improved by their more accurate use of the sounds that letters make
- pupils' use of their spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting skills when writing, especially in other subjects, is improved.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, leaders of English and mathematics, special educational needs and early years. Three members of the governing body, including the chair, met the inspector to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's current plans for development were evaluated, alongside recent records of the quality of teaching. Visits to most

classrooms were conducted jointly with you to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, review the quality of pupils' writing over time, listen to pupils read and talk informally about pupils' experiences of school. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including that relating to safeguarding and governance. The inspector met with a group of boys from key stage 2 to discuss their work.