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Mr Timothy Milne
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Dear Mr Milne

Short inspection of St Mary's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This results from rigorous pursuit of your vision that the school should serve the local community as well as it can. Leaders have created a culture in which staff are reflective and continuously seek ways of developing their practice. Ineffective teaching is not tolerated. You provide high-quality support to help staff meet your high expectations and you take appropriate action to tackle any underperformance. This is why teaching has improved further since the last inspection. As a result, pupils become confident, independent learners who throw themselves into school life with gusto.

Leaders have a clear and accurate view of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school because they use a range of available information to build a picture of quality. For example, leaders use the results of assessments to spot pupils who may not be achieving as well as expected, and to work out why. Effective action is implemented when needed, such as that taken following leaders' analysis of last year's key stage 2 national test results. These showed that pupils lacked speed with mental mathematics. The subsequent decision to increase the length of the school morning has provided more time for pupils to practise these skills before applying them in mathematics lessons. Their fluency is growing as a result.

You seek, and willingly act upon, external views about the school. For example, you survey the views of parents. Overwhelmingly, this tells you that parents are very positive about your leadership and the improvements they have seen in the school

over recent years. Nevertheless, a very small number have expressed concerns to you about the way some pupils behave. You have looked at these concerns and have decided to rethink the organisation of lunchtime activities to ensure that pupils are purposefully occupied while in the playground. Similarly, you have accessed the services of a school improvement adviser and readily take on board her pertinent suggestions.

Governors ensure that they are well informed about what is going well and what needs further attention. Decisions about spending the school's limited resources are based on measured analysis of the educational benefits against the costs involved. For example, the high costs incurred by adapting the building and reducing the use of mixed-age classes has led to improved progress for pupils in English and mathematics.

Subject leaders understand their roles well and say you have given good support to build their skills and confidence. They support you effectively by checking how well their subjects are taught and by providing helpful advice to teachers, if required.

Senior leaders check the overall quality of teaching by visiting lessons, talking to pupils and looking at the work in their books. Your notes from these checks show that leaders have a good understanding of what makes for successful teaching. On the whole, the feedback you give to teachers following these checks is helpful and leads to further improvement. However, you have not looked at pupils' writing closely enough to spot that teachers sometimes allow pupils to miss out basic punctuation or to misspell common words when they are writing. This is the reason why pupils do not consistently write as well as they can.

Similarly, your checks on pupils' mathematics books show, correctly, that pupils are beginning to apply their number knowledge more easily to mathematical challenges. However, some books show that pupils sometimes spend too long in lessons repeating simple calculations and do not have the chance to move on to harder work soon enough. Consequently, some pupils' progress is slower than it could be.

When they are well challenged, pupils respond enthusiastically. They enjoy trying new things and show obvious pleasure in the praise they receive for having a go and not giving up. They behave well in lessons and respond quickly to teachers' instructions. Pupils spoke confidently and politely to me. They were proud to show their work and keen to tell me how much they enjoy school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed. Thorough checks on staff, governors and volunteers ensure that only suitable people are allowed to have contact with pupils. Staff are alert to spotting and reporting concerns about pupils' welfare. The large number of well-trained first aiders means that pupils are well cared for, should an accident happen.

This attention to pupils' welfare was captured by a parent, who commented, 'The

school has the children at its heart, from the governors, to the cleaning and catering staff.' Records show that concerns are taken seriously and followed up promptly. The designated leads for safeguarding work closely with other agencies, such as local authority child protection teams, where needed, to support pupils in being safe beyond the school day.

Inspection findings

- Secure, trusting relationships between adults and pupils lay foundations for successful learning throughout the school. Teachers and teaching assistants show genuine pleasure in pupils' company. This helps pupils to feel valued as individuals and gives them confidence as learners.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes follow instructions promptly and without question. They learn to sustain concentration, even when a task is tricky. This is because adults are quick to praise them for 'sticking with it' and not giving up.
- Teaching in the early years is often imaginative and captures children's interest. Activities are carefully planned to enable children to practise their growing reading, writing and number skills while they work with adults and in their play.
- Issues, which affected the quality of teaching within key stage 1 last year, led to lower-than-anticipated outcomes for some pupils who are now in Year 3. Leaders' actions kept the negative impact of this to a minimum. Effective strategies are now in place to help affected pupils make up lost ground.
- The quality of teaching in key stage 1 is now stable and improving rapidly. Almost all pupils currently in Years 1 and 2 are making at least the progress expected of them. Extra support is in place for the few who have made slower progress so far this year.
- Leaders' analysis of assessment information shows no notable difference in the performance of boys and girls currently in the school. Inspection evidence supports this picture. Leaders are aware of potential differences in rates of progress made by the small number of disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils nationally in some subjects. Leaders are investigating this further to inform appropriate action.
- The change to the morning timetable has enabled pupils to acquire more secure recall of number facts. Teachers use the extra time to teach specific skills and systematically build pupils' understanding of numbers. Pupils apply these skills into more complicated mathematical challenges in mathematics lessons and in other subjects. For example, Year 6 pupils completed questions using the Mayan number system during a history lesson. As a result, pupils are developing the skills of mathematical reasoning.
- Nevertheless, progress in this aspect is limited for some pupils in Years 1 to 6 by the nature of the tasks they are set in mathematics lessons. Pupils' books show that some are required to spend too long practising basic calculations that they can already complete confidently. When this happens, these pupils do not move on to harder work quickly enough. This limits their progress in building deeper

mathematical understanding.

- Teachers ensure that pupils learn how to use grammar and to punctuate sentences correctly. Most pupils can spell words correctly in line with what is expected for their age. However, results in the 2016 national Year 6 writing assessments were disappointing. Leaders correctly identified that this was, in large part, because some pupils did not use the punctuation, grammar and spelling which they are capable of. Pupils' books show that teachers do not consistently insist that pupils apply these skills whenever they write. This is why some did not demonstrate in the assessments that they can write at the standard expected for their age.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers are consistent in their insistence that pupils use correct spelling, grammar and punctuation, at a standard appropriate to their age, whenever they write
- teachers ensure that pupils move on to harder work quickly enough in mathematics lessons so that they apply higher forms of mathematical thinking as soon as they are ready.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, other school staff and a group of governors, including the chair. I spoke informally to pupils in lessons, as well as to parents as they collected their children from school. I looked at the responses to the Parent View survey and your survey of parents' opinions. I considered the results of Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. We visited lessons together. I looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding and child protection. The inspection focused particularly on rates of progress for different groups of pupils as they move through the school; the impact of leaders' actions in response to the identification of weaknesses; and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.