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Mr Andrew Lincoln
Acting Headteacher
St Nicolas & St Mary CofE (Aided) Primary School
Eastern Avenue
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Dear Mr Lincoln

Short inspection of St Nicolas & St Mary CofE (Aided) Primary 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

From the time of your appointment as acting headteacher in January 2016, you have led the school through some significant staffing and leadership changes. It is clear that you have the confidence of parents, carers, pupils and staff. You have built an increasingly effective team of senior and middle leaders to ensure that a good standard of education has been maintained. Some subject leaders are new to the school and still developing confidence in monitoring, so their impact is at an early stage of development.

Your governors are knowledgeable, fully involved in the school's work and offer you strong strategic support. Parents describe the school as a very happy community and were effusive in their praise of how well their children are understood and cared for by staff.

At the previous inspection, inspectors recognised pupils' good behaviour and excellent attitudes to learning. You have been successful in maintaining these strengths. Over the last three years, pupils in Year 6 have exceeded national averages in reading and mathematics. Attainment in writing has been above or close to national averages and Year 6 pupils are on track to do even better in writing this year.

You took swift and effective action to address the dip in standards in key stage 1 in 2016. An example of this is that leaders have designated a specialist teacher of pupils who have specific learning difficulties to support pupils in the early years, Year 1 and Year 2. The appointment of new senior leaders and some redeployment of staff have helped increase the pace of school improvement. As a result, current pupils in key stage 1 are making rapid progress and are well placed to achieve better outcomes this year. However, you acknowledge that some inconsistencies in teaching and the expectations of what pupils can achieve remain. In the lessons we visited in Year 2 and Year 3, teachers did not always expect enough of the most able pupils, which slowed pupils' progress.

At the time of the last inspection you were asked to ensure that pupils were given a range of opportunities to use and apply their writing skills in other subjects. I saw evidence of a range of writing across history, geography and science. Pupils told me they are more confident in themselves as writers. They love to share their work with younger children in the school and to choose their own topics to write about. You were also asked to improve pupils' spelling and punctuation. In 2016, pupils' attainment in grammar, punctuation and spelling was above the national average. Leaders have focused on pupils applying these skills to independent writing. The work seen in pupils' books indicates increasing accuracy in punctuation and spelling. You appreciate, however, that there is more to be done to achieve consistently good handwriting across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Checks on the suitability of staff are recorded appropriately. Stringent safety measures have ensured that building work has not affected pupils' safety in the playground. Staff record and follow up any incidents or concerns thoroughly to make sure pupils stay safe. There are well-documented records showing how the school works closely with other agencies to protect pupils from neglect or abuse. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe while using the internet. A strength of the school is how well the home-school link workers support pupils who are experiencing loss or upheaval in family life. Some parents sought me out or wrote to me praising the support they have received.

Absence is taken seriously and followed up immediately. Attendance overall and for all groups is at or above national levels. Persistent absence has reduced for all groups to below national levels.

Parents told me that teachers go out of their way to engage at an individual level with their children's needs. As a result, pupils feel listened to and cared for and enjoy coming to school. They told me that they appreciate the dedicated drop-in sessions available where they can speak to an adult if they have any worries or concerns.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I examined how effectively leaders have responded to the dip in key stage 1 outcomes in 2016. I was particularly interested in the progress currently being made by disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1. I explored how well the most able pupils are achieving in writing and mathematics in both key stage 1 and key stage 2. I also considered how effectively leaders have responded to the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection, especially relating to standards in writing. In addition, I evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding and how well the school supports families of pupils who have too many days off school.
- You were quite rightly concerned about the dip in standards at the end of key stage 1 in 2016. Pupils, especially those with expected prior attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, attained less well than other pupils nationally. The most recent progress tracking information demonstrates that previous differences between groups of pupils have diminished and standards are rising.
- During our visits to lessons, we saw additional adults making a positive impact on pupils' learning. Recent training in the teaching of writing is making a difference. However, some of the work in pupils' books shows that teachers' expectations for all abilities are not consistently high enough. In lower key stage 2, for example, the most able pupils are not consistently challenged sufficiently in their mathematics and writing.
- New members of staff in the literacy team are having a positive impact. A whole-school approach, which focuses on pupils' editing their writing and developing greater independence, is being embedded. Pupils enjoy having more freedom to choose what to write about based on their own interests. There are many examples of high-quality, extended pieces of writing across different subjects in Years 5 and 6. These show that pupils use and apply their grammar skills effectively in their writing.
- Numbers of disadvantaged pupils in each year group are small. Effective interventions in mathematics, writing and in supporting pupils' emotional well-being are ensuring that the vast majority of disadvantaged pupils are on track to reach the expected outcomes in each year group.
- New middle and subject leaders are gaining in confidence. They have worked alongside external consultants to use a wide range of strategies to improve pupils' progress in writing. Performance information shows the positive impact of these initiatives. However, not all subject leaders are fully involved in monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders of mathematics have ensured that teachers place greater emphasis on developing pupils' reasoning skills and problem-solving. Pupils are good at explaining their mathematical thinking and applying what they already know to new work. The curriculum helps bring mathematics to life. Pupils were keen to tell me about a whole-school mathematics week which included drawing up budgets for opening and stocking a confectionary shop within the school. Pupils designed their own mathematics fancy dress costumes, such as a 'fraction pizza' and worked out the cost effectiveness of baking or buying cakes to sell.

- Behaviour in lessons and on the playground is good. Newcomers are quick to make friends and neither parents nor pupils report any bullying. In every classroom we visited, pupils were polite, friendly and confident to express their views.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers move pupils on in their learning to deepen their understanding as soon as they are ready, particularly the most able pupils
- pupils' handwriting improves and all teachers share the same high expectations of pupils' written work
- subject and middle leaders have further support and opportunities to effectively monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that standards, particularly in writing, continue to rise.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and your senior and middle leaders. I also met with representatives of the governing body and had a telephone call with a representative of the local authority. I observed the quality of learning with you in all year groups, except Year 4 who were on a school trip. I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information, the school improvement plan, leaders' self-evaluation, pupils' work, and child protection procedures and policies. I talked to pupils in lessons and before the start of the school day about their learning and jointly looked at their books with your middle and senior leaders. I viewed the 173 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 46 staff questionnaires. At the beginning of the day I held conversations with parents and carers.