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Mrs Marie Szydłowska
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Dear Mrs Szydłowska

Short inspection of Birkenhead Christ Church CofE Primary School

Following my visit on 7 June 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your dedicated, calm leadership has ensured that there is a shared and unrelenting focus on outcomes for pupils among leaders, governors and staff. You have effectively tackled the weakest teaching in the school to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is improving.

The recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. Inspectors asked the school to improve the way in which teachers check on pupils' progress. Leaders have simplified systems to enable teachers to set clear targets for pupils' learning and to identify pupils who require extra support. Inspectors also asked the school to improve the pupils' achievement in mathematics. A focus on developing pupils' mathematical reasoning skills has resulted in high rates of progress by the end of key stage 2 and improving standards at the end of key stage 1. Another area for improvement was to increase the level of challenge for pupils so that they make better progress in their learning, especially the most able pupils. The high rates of progress for pupils in Year 6 in 2016 show that this has been effective, as does the proportion of pupils achieving the highest standards at the end of key stage 1. However, overall standards for pupils at the end of Year 2 last year were low and as such we agreed that this would form the basis of this inspection. We also agreed that teachers need to improve the pace of learning for boys in key stage 1.

Pupils gain a great deal of reassurance from the excellent relationships that exist

between staff and pupils. They are keen and ready to learn. This also aids the transition from one year group to another as pupils move through the school. Pupils' learning needs are targeted quickly because teachers arrange classes flexibly. Pupils are very positive about the education they receive. They say that the staff care and are constantly thinking about their welfare. However, pupils' attendance is not good, which is affecting their achievement.

The high proportion of pupils leaving and joining the school at different times of the year has a negative effect on the overall standards they achieve, particularly at the end of key stage 1. However, this is not attributable to the quality of education that is provided by the school. Nor do you use this constant change in pupil cohorts as an excuse. Your staff welcome all pupils, demonstrating the strong, Christian character of the school. Classrooms are busy places where pupils enjoy the active, practical aspects of their work. Their polite, welcoming manner is a credit to the personal and social development that they receive from the school. The next stage for the school is to make sure that pupils' attitudes towards reading are improved through a wider choice of texts.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding leaders are vigilant and implement school policies with vigour and determination. On the day of the inspection there was a safeguarding incident which you handled in exemplary fashion. You ensured that the well-being of pupils was paramount and as such they were safe from harm.

Pupils feel safe in the school because they understand and appreciate the vigilance of staff. Pupils believe that staff act quickly and decisively when there are instances of poor behaviour or bullying. Pupils on the school's 'safe squad' help to reinforce this message, for example by devising a child-friendly anti-bullying policy.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff and governors undertake appropriate and regular training. Governors ensure that policies reflect local priorities and they are deeply committed to the welfare of pupils.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, we agreed to look at how effectively leaders use targeted support to improve boys' attainment in writing and mathematics in key stage 1. This was due to the low standards achieved by boys in 2016, the large majority of whom are from White British backgrounds. Although these results were lower than expected, the present progress of pupils is good. This is due to a greater emphasis upon pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics and the use of good-quality texts to improve pupils' vocabulary choices in their writing. Leaders use additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively to provide individualised support that is highly responsive to pupils' needs, not only academically but personally and socially. These pupils make at least good progress from their starting points.

- Leaders use the funding for disadvantaged pupils to reduce the size of classes, which

are organised according to the needs of pupils in English and mathematics. This means that there is effective targeted support for pupils' next steps in learning which is based on sound assessments of pupils' skills. Teachers plan interventions for pupils who are underachieving. These strategies are kept under continual review to ensure that the next steps in their learning are addressed. When on task, pupils are focused and enjoy their learning. However, some boys switch off in lessons due to the lack of opportunities to participate in whole-class sessions. While they are never disruptive, this slows the pace of their learning. We agreed that this could be improved upon to help boys to make further progress in their learning.

- The second area that we agreed to look at was how effectively leaders are improving teaching and learning in reading in key stage 1. Reading is improving because of new, interesting texts that have been introduced to classes. Pupils have opportunities to access a higher level of language, which is reflected in the improving level of description in their writing books. Pupils read with developing fluency and expression and the most able are challenged well.
- The concerted effort to promote pupils' phonics skills has led to improved results in the phonics check in Year 1 over the last three years. Pupils use these skills effectively to break down unfamiliar words when reading their books, which are well matched to their abilities and next steps in learning. Those who struggle are identified for daily reading support. Leaders constantly review the effectiveness of this support to adapt activities so that they suit the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress. There are clear plans for improving reading in the school. However, pupils' attitudes to reading vary according to the texts they read. We agreed that while texts are well matched to pupils' abilities, these are sometimes not chosen well enough to promote a love of reading.
- The final key line of enquiry that we agreed upon was to look at how effectively leaders are tackling pupils' absence. You have established clear procedures for pupils who are at risk of missing education. The high number of pupils leaving and joining the school negatively affects the school's attendance figures because staff are tenacious in ensuring that pupils are suitably placed in other settings before removing them from the school register.
- The attendance leader is passionate about supporting pupils and their families to ensure regular attendance at school. There are a range of well-thought-out strategies to promote attendance, including rewards for regular attendance that are very popular among pupils. The school has already identified that there are opportunities to improve the engagement of parents, especially those who are new to the school, by identifying pupils who may be at risk of low attendance as early as possible. However, the work done to support pupils maintains the level of attendance rather than improving it. This is a positive outcome despite overall attendance being lower than the national average. The attitude among staff is one of persistence and positivity and the school links well with local authority services. We agreed that the school's targets for attendance should be raised to match the national average and that parents should be held more stringently to account for their child's absence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers improve the pace of learning for boys in key stage 1 by improving their participation in learning, particularly at the start of lessons
- pupils' attitudes towards reading are improved so that they choose to read for enjoyment
- leaders set high targets for pupils' attendance and engage parents at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure that they are held accountable for their child's absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with leaders to discuss safeguarding arrangements, school development and self-evaluation, the use of the school's funding for disadvantaged pupils and how the school has improved since the previous inspection.
- I spoke to pupils both formally and informally throughout the inspection about their work and a range of areas of school life.
- I conducted a scrutiny of key stage 1 pupils' mathematics and writing books.
- I heard pupils from Year 1, Year 2 and Year 6 read as well as hearing pupils read as part of their classroom activities.
- I reviewed documentation, which included the school's pupil premium statement, the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, the school's development plan and the school's most recent information about the progress of key stage 1 pupils in writing and mathematics.
- I spoke with parents at the start of the school day.
- I visited Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 classes along with you and other senior leaders to observe pupils' learning.
- I met with the reading, writing and special educational needs leaders to discuss the impact of pupil interventions.
- I met with governors to discuss safeguarding and aspects of school leadership and management.
- I met with a representatives from the Diocese of Chester, and from Wirral local

authority, to discuss school effectiveness.

- I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff. I also looked at the school's logs of behaviour and bullying incidents.