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18 July 2017

Mr Paul Brooksbank
Acting Headteacher
St Mary and St Paul's CofE Primary School
Bryer Road
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Dear Mr Brooksbank

Short inspection of St Mary and St Paul's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 04 July 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. You became acting headteacher in September 2016 and you have an acting deputy headteacher and an acting assistant headteacher. You are a capable team and successfully continue the good work of the school until governors can appoint a permanent headteacher.

You have a large proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and who have social and emotional needs. You put pupils' needs at the centre of your work and support them and their families well. For example, you support families on low incomes by your participation in the 'Fair Share' food supply scheme, where families are able to access parcels of food from school for a small administrative donation.

You have effectively addressed the areas for improvement that inspectors identified in the previous inspection report. Your checks on the quality of teaching and learning are now more thorough. You observe lessons, for example, and feed back strengths and weakness to teachers so that they can improve their practice. In most cases, the work that is provided by teachers for pupils is now a good match to their abilities. For example, I saw evidence of most-able pupils in Year 6 tackling a challenging science investigation into light and shadow. This deepened their learning, because they had chosen the investigation for themselves. As a result of these changes, teaching is effective and most pupils make good progress.

The governing body now holds the school more effectively to account for its performance and no longer relies solely on reports from you. Governors have

received training in how to understand documents such as the inspection dashboard, and can analyse assessment information for themselves. They also commissioned an independent consultant to give them an external view of the school's performance to strengthen their understanding of the quality of education the school provides. Governors have a good overview of the school and its priorities. They report that they challenge leaders effectively, but the minutes of governors' meetings do not reflect this clearly.

Although you rightly focus on providing pupils with the basic skills they need in English and mathematics, this is not at the expense of a broad and balanced curriculum. I saw good evidence of pupils improving their art skills, for instance, and the school is proud of its 'Artsmark Gold' award. I also heard a group of pupils developing their proficiency in playing brass instruments, with a good attempt at performing 'The Floral Dance'.

Only a small number of parents replied to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and there were no negative responses. Parents typically described staff as 'very approachable' and said that their children 'really enjoy going to school'. Staff, too, were very positive about the work of the school when I spoke with them. They appreciated the training you provide and felt particular benefit from the coaching they receive through the primary school sport premium.

Your plans for school improvement contain appropriate actions and you have identified the key areas for improvement. However, you acknowledged that the criteria that you use to evaluate the impact of changes are not precise and do not measure the expected outcomes for pupils.

You also recognise that provisional assessment information for Year 6 in 2017 indicates a decline in reading attainment. However, you anticipated that this year group would not perform as strongly as pupils in 2016, as they had low starting points in key stage 1. You shared with me your plans to have reading as a focus for next year's school improvement plan, as writing and mathematics had figured prominently in this year's and you felt the need to balance this out. You also told me that you intend to challenge the marking of the reading test, as a number of pupils were only one mark below the threshold.

The local authority and the diocese provide effective support. Although they provide a 'light touch' level of support, they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. As the designated safeguarding lead, you log details of safeguarding concerns thoroughly and you effectively follow up issues with social services or other outside agencies.

The safeguarding culture in the school is strong. Staff have a good knowledge of how to recognise signs of different types of abuse, such as child sexual exploitation, and they noted in conversation with me that safeguarding is 'everybody's

responsibility'. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, for example on the internet, and they know about different forms of bullying. They say it sometimes happens in school, but that staff are swift to respond and manage the infrequent incidents. The school's register of checks on members of staff who work with pupils is compliant, but I found a minor administration omission that leaders must keep a check on.

Inspection findings

- I explored a number of key lines of enquiry during the inspection, which I shared with you at the start of the day. I have reported on some of these earlier in this letter.
- Children enter Nursery with a variety of social and emotional needs and they have skills and knowledge that are below typical for their age. You and your early years staff work hard to develop children's social skills and behaviour. This is effective, as children show good attitudes to their learning and behave well. I saw children's work that showed good progress in writing. For example, some of the most able children can write quite complex sentences, including writing, with support in their spelling, about Kandinsky and abstract art. You anticipate that about six out of 10 children will achieve a good level of development in 2017 and, although this is below the national average, it represents good progress from their starting points because of effective teaching.
- The teaching of phonics in key stage 1 is effective. Your provisional assessment indicates that over seven out of 10 pupils in Year 1 will reach the threshold in the phonics check for 2017. This represents good progress from pupils' starting points in a cohort which contains pupils who have a number of specific needs. In Year 2, you anticipate that more than 90% of pupils will reach the threshold in 2017. This is above the national average and represents good progress.
- Pupils in key stage 1 make good progress in mathematics and writing. In writing in Year 1, for example, lower-ability pupils use 'because' to write more complex sentences. The most able can write engaging sentences when retelling traditional stories, and can use advanced punctuation, such as ellipses. One such example is, 'Cinderella ran and dropped her ring but... when the prince found it Cinderella didn't come back.' Provisional assessment information for Year 2 in 2017 indicates improvement in writing and mathematics compared to 2016.
- Another focus for the inspection was pupils' progress in science in key stage 2. Pupils acquire the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding and make good progress. There was good evidence of pupils using their writing skills in science. For example, in Year 6, pupils write reports about investigations into properties of light. Provisional assessment information for 2017 shows that about three quarters of pupils reached the expected standard. This represents good progress from their low starting points in key stage 1.
- I found that the school's website is not compliant in respect of information about how leaders use the pupil premium and about governors. However, you acknowledged this and you have undertaken to put matters right as soon as possible.

- You have had some success in reducing absences for pupils who have support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities. You take all reasonable steps to encourage good attendance, but you recognise that you need to persist in your efforts to reduce absences for disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they closely monitor the administration of the single central record of checks on adults who work with pupils in school
- they make sure the school's website is compliant and remains so
- they include measurable criteria in their school improvement plans that evaluate the impact of their actions on pupils' achievement
- they focus on actions to improve reading in key stage 2, so that attainment by the end of Year 6 returns to being close to the national average
- they continue to take action to reduce absences, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out short visits to the early years and all classes in key stage 1 and key stage 2, which were joint activities with you and the acting deputy headteacher. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of incidents of bullying and misbehaviour, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions and conversations with members of staff, governors and pupils. I had a discussion with a representative from the local authority. I also had a discussion on the telephone with a representative from the diocese. I analysed pupils' work and the school's own assessment information. I evaluated 10 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. Furthermore, I analysed six responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no other survey responses.