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Ms Sophie Liardet
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Liardet

Short inspection of St Mark's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have developed systems and introduced new rigour to the school, securing the confidence of staff and parents. Parents appreciate your leadership approach for the benefit of all the pupils. One parent commented, 'The school is amazing now, really helpful and a real family place.' This view was typical of the vast majority of parents spoken to during the inspection.

You have worked closely with senior leaders, the local authority and the governing body to ensure that a good standard of education has been maintained. Your careful review of the school's work has enabled leaders to focus on the right areas for development. Governors are very knowledgeable, fully involved in the school's work and offer you strong strategic support. Working together, you have developed an approach to teaching that has ensured that pupils have a secure grasp of the core skills they need to enjoy a rich and interesting curriculum. The work planned for pupils meets their needs and, as a result, pupils achieve well. New assessment and monitoring systems, and teachers' effective use of assessment information in planning lessons, ensures that pupils make strong progress. Leaders at all levels are involved in checking pupils' progress and, as a result, leadership capacity is strong.

Classrooms, the library, communal areas and the early years block are attractive places for learning, and pupils are excited by plans to develop facilities still further.

All areas are well resourced and managed effectively. You use the communal spaces well to celebrate pupils' achievements, particularly in writing, which is of a high standard and very well presented by all year groups. There is significant importance placed on fostering a friendly and accepting culture here. In the words of some of the pupils I spoke to, 'The school is both a respectful and inspiring place which we value a great deal.' These positive attitudes, which you have helped to develop, ensure that all pupils are achieving well with the help of their teachers and thoughtfully deployed teaching assistants.

In recent years, the development of writing and the teaching of mathematics have ensured that outcomes in these subjects are now as good as in reading. You have made sure that teachers teach key writing and mathematical skills effectively so that these can be threaded through other areas of the curriculum. For example, work related to a Year 6 scientific investigation looking at the efficacy of birds' beaks enabled pupils to apply their reasoning and writing skills.

You have successfully addressed the areas requiring improvement identified during the last inspection. Your determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning has helped the school continue to improve, not only in key stages 1 and 2, but also in the early years. Teachers understand the school's priorities well and are committed to ensuring that all pupils do as well as they can. Strong relationships with pupils and high-quality teacher training have enabled teachers to plan activities that meet pupils' needs well. Consequently, pupils make consistently good progress.

You, together with your senior leaders, rightly acknowledge that the progress of disadvantaged pupils must continue to be a focus for staff, and know that the attendance of these pupils needs to improve further still.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and records are detailed and of high quality. All checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school are in place. The designated safeguarding leaders are known to all in the school and procedures are understood and followed. Clear systems are in place for making referrals when concerns arise and subsequent actions are followed up carefully. Links with external agencies are effective, including the local authority's early help team, police and social services. Staff training, including the 'Prevent' duty, is kept up to date and your staff have a good local knowledge of potential problems present within the community, such as pupils whose parents may have health issues which might impact upon their school life.

Pupils reported to me that they feel safe in school and they know they are listened to should they need to raise a concern. They say that behaviour is mostly good or very good and that bullying is very rare. This is because pupils know and trust key members of staff. This view is matched by most parents, though leaders recognise that a very small number of parents felt that they would like more feedback when they raise concerns. The school is aware of this and is working hard to ensure that the correct procedures are followed.

Inspection findings

- We agreed at the start of the inspection that the first key line of enquiry should relate to pupils' progress in writing, because last year, pupils' progress was weaker in writing than in reading and mathematics. You told me that your leadership team had already identified this as a priority for the school.
- Our visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' books provided us with strong evidence that pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is good and that pupils benefit from clear advice from their teachers on how they can continue to improve. Having the ability to explore more challenging texts has helped inspire pupils to write more fluently and to view themselves as young writers. A good example of this was the powerful language choices being made by Year 5 pupils when writing a sequel to an exciting story they had heard.
- Pupils take immense pride in their writing. From the very start of their time in the early years classes, children are encouraged to write independently and with confidence. This results in children being able to write with greater fluency by the time they are in Year 1. The passion and drive shown by the subject leader has been instrumental in embedding recent developments at the school.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, particularly those in key stage 1 and the early years. Last year, there were some differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers.
- You believe that all pupils deserve to achieve well to overcome any barriers to learning that may hamper them. Staff have worked hard to eradicate any variability in the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils. The difference between these pupils and their peers is narrowing. Staff recognise the importance of maintaining a continual focus on disadvantaged pupils, to ensure that their needs are well met.
- You are now starting to reflect critically on the effectiveness and impact of the action plan in place to monitor how well the additional pupil premium funding is spent. You evaluate not only the impact this has on all pupils, but also focus on the outcomes of individual pupils. For instance, leaders recognise that intensive small group work is effective in key stage 1 in improving pupil performance. In addition, supporting pupils' involvement in extra-curricular activities, where there is a cost, is helping older pupils to foster positive attitudes to school life. You acknowledge that staff must continue to focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and ensure that the recently introduced strategies to improve pupils' outcomes in early years and key stage 1 are embedded fully.
- My third line of enquiry focused on attendance. The most recent published information suggested that disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were persistently absent more than is typical nationally. Discussions with school leaders and scrutiny of records quickly explained why some individual pupils were absent. For instance, sometimes this relates to specific medical needs which pupils may have. Staff work effectively with the education welfare service to continue to support parents of disadvantaged pupils.

- Pupils are actively encouraged and rewarded for their good attendance. Parents receive a phone call from the school on the first day of absence. This is improving attendance overall.
- The school has strong and effective strategies in place to monitor and improve attendance further. However, the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils is not as good as their peers and we agreed that it would be useful for the school to maintain its focus on this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching approaches that help to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are embedded, with a renewed focus on key stage 1 and the early years
- the good work to develop pupils' positive attitudes to school life are sustained so that all pupils attend even more regularly, particularly the school's disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim McLoughlin
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and the school's safeguarding lead teacher. I met with governors and a representative of the local authority. I had informal discussions with groups of parents on the playground at the start and the end of the day as well on the telephone. I scrutinised the safeguarding procedures with the business manager. I met with members of the senior leadership team. You accompanied me on visits to classrooms. I talked with pupils about their learning. I scrutinised pupils' books and listened to a range of pupils read as they were engaged in their learning. I also evaluated school documents, including: school development plans; a commissioned local authority review; safeguarding records; and information about current pupils' achievement and attendance.