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Miss Sarah Bott
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Dear Miss Bott

Short inspection of St Martin's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. St Martin's Church of England Primary School is a well-organised and welcoming school where all groups of pupils are cherished and valued for their uniqueness. They develop into caring individuals who are tolerant and accepting of differences, creating a harmonious learning community. This is because you, governors and staff are united in implementing your FRESH values (friendship, respect, empathy, sharing and humility) in all aspects of school life.

Parents are unanimous in their praise of the school, stating that they know that their children are well looked after and cared for. 'Children are welcomed and wanted here', said one parent speaking for many. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities praise the support that both they and their children are given by you and your staff. They are particularly pleased with the prompt identification of their children's needs and subsequent support given.

The previous report noted that pupils were not making consistent progress across the school. You and your team worked tirelessly at helping staff understand the increased expectations of the curriculum to effectively improve pupils' progress and learning. In this respect you have dealt swiftly with the previous report's recommendations.

You devised your own assessment system to support your revised curriculum and subsequently your very detailed tracking of pupils' progress immediately identifies any pupils who are falling behind. You and your leaders act swiftly, offering good-quality support and ensuring that pupils are well prepared for the next sequence of learning in order that they catch up quickly. At the same time, you have ensured that all staff are familiar with the increased expectations of the national curriculum.

Pupils are now able to apply their knowledge and skills to a wide variety of learning experiences. Pupils with high prior attainment are given 'hot' challenges to make work more demanding and to push the most able on in their learning, a further weakness that you have addressed since the last inspection.

You encourage parents to learn with their children at home and many parents whom I spoke to said that the introduction of 'learning logs' (topics that pupils research) has had a very positive impact on their child's learning and parents' involvement in it. Pupils are developing a love of reading, an area that we focused on during the inspection.

You faced many difficulties with staffing this academic year. This did not deter you and your teachers from ensuring that all groups of pupils received the help that they needed to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, all groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and those with high prior attainment, make good progress in relation to their starting points in mathematics and writing. You are still working on addressing the issue of reading where progress is swift but not as strong as that in writing and mathematics.

At the time of the last inspection, pupils did not make consistent progress in all years. You have suitably addressed this weakness. Over time, good-quality teaching, learning and assessment, coupled to your in-house 'layered curriculum' which progressively builds on pupils' prior learning, has ensured that pupils are making good gains in their learning, particularly in writing and mathematics. You have clearly defined in each year group what pupils must learn in relation to their starting points, and your teachers monitor progress of all groups of pupils towards the targets and outcomes set.

Pupils are very polite and care about one another. This ensures that a respectful culture is prevalent in your school. Your 'prayer tree' is a testament to your pupils' understanding of empathy – for example, when individuals write prayers asking God to help those less fortunate than themselves. Displays around the school celebrate pupils' work and achievements. Classrooms are vibrant with high-quality 'working walls', which signpost the steps pupils need to take should they get stuck with their work. This has a very positive effect on developing pupils' skills of independence.

When we looked at pupils' books and went into lessons, we saw that in the early years foundation stage, especially in the Reception classes, children were not forming their letters correctly and their spelling of common words was weak. We agreed that this had a 'knock-on effect' further up the school, where, in Year 2,

pupils struggled to join their letters and, in Year 6, even though they had developed a fluent style in writing, there were still weaknesses in spelling.

This year, in Year 1, there was a dip in the outcomes of the phonics screening check where only 67% of pupils reached the expected standard. This was lower than the previous year but largely attributable to the academic profile of the class, which had a high level of pupils needing to catch up and pupils who had special educational needs and/or disabilities. You and the governors have already identified the need to improve outcomes in phonics with more opportunities provided for pupils to apply what they have learned in both reading and writing activities.

When we looked at the attendance registers, we concluded that even though attendance is above that seen nationally, a small group of disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, were either arriving late in the mornings or missing some phonics sessions due to absenteeism. You have rightly identified that there is still further work to do with the parents of these small groups of pupils so that their children do not miss valuable learning and get to school on time.

National data for 2016 indicates that Year 6 pupils' progress was better in mathematics and writing than in reading. Too few pupils were working in greater depth in reading. Current school data shows that good progress in mathematics and writing has been maintained and you have increased the number of Year 6 pupils working in greater depth in reading. However, in 2017, there were a few pupils who just missed attaining age-related expectations in reading by a few marks. When we looked at their work and the teachers' assessments over time of their reading skills, pupils who did not score the pass mark in the national tests had nevertheless repeatedly scored high marks during the course of the year. We discussed that while they were confident in class, they struggled to apply their skills confidently to new situations, particularly during testing. By the end of Year 2, pupils attained broadly average standards in reading and mathematics but not all pupils of middle prior attainment reached age-related expectations in writing.

During the inspection, I heard pupils read from Years 2 and 6. While they had strong skills of comprehension, they were unable to explain the author's choice of words to create impact for the reader. Their answers were very literal and did not demonstrate the higher-order skill of inferring the meaning of texts.

You have rightly identified the need to accelerate rates of progress across key stage 2 in reading and key stage 1 in writing for all groups of pupils. You have already started looking at introducing a broader range of authors and harder reading texts across the school. You have also started evaluating how you can improve the teaching of writing and spelling in key stage 1.

You are very thorough in your evaluation of all aspects of provision and you know your school well. Your self-evaluation is accurate and governors are knowledgeable in identifying the school's strengths and areas for development.

However, your school improvement plan is a very large document making it difficult to establish the urgency of actions to be taken and their subsequent impact on outcomes for all groups of pupils. We discussed the need to make improvement planning more succinct and manageable so that governors can evaluate the outcomes of different groups of pupils more effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture in school. Leaders, including governors, have successfully created an environment in which pupils are safe and secure. Parents say that the school is safe and this gives them peace of mind because of staff's vigilance. Records, including the school's single central register on staff's suitability to work with pupils, are maintained carefully and accurately.

Leaders keep careful notes and records of actions taken when they have concerns about pupils' well-being. Parents know that every step will be taken to ensure that no vulnerable child is at risk. All staff have undergone appropriate child protection training, including 'Prevent' duty training, to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively. Consequently, all adults know what to do if they have concerns about pupils' safety. Appropriate procedures are in place to make referrals to external agencies where relevant to do so.

Pupils say that they feel safe and that adults are always there to help them. Pupils explain confidently how they are taught to act safely and not disclose any personal information when using the internet. Through a well-structured programme of personal, social, health and emotional development, they appropriately explore their feelings and any concerns that they might have in a safe classroom environment.

Behaviour in and around the school remains exemplary. Pupils care about one another and the school is a harmonious learning community. Pupils understand the different forms of bullying and say that harassment is not common in the school. Were it to occur, it would be dealt with effectively, a view shared by parents who say that the school deals with any issues that they might have quickly.

A strength of the safeguarding culture in the school is the regular communication with parents so that they are kept informed of all aspects of school life and are signposted to services that they might need.

Outcomes from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, strongly support the high-level confidence that parents have in yourself, your staff and the level of care provided by the school.

Inspection findings

- St Martin's Church of England Primary School continues to serve its community well. You have identified accurately what needs to be done to improve pupils' rates of progress in reading so that they match the good progress seen in writing and mathematics. You have implemented training on questioning so that

teachers are better skilled at asking questions that challenge pupils' understanding of text.

- Governors have been instrumental in asking you questions about the level of challenge that is offered to those pupils with high prior attainment. You have been successful in having more Year 6 pupils this year working at greater depth. Nevertheless, there is still more work to be done in ensuring that all pupils reach age-related expectations from their different starting points in writing and mathematics in key stage 1.
- Pupils' impeccable conduct in lessons ensures that pupils are on task and engaged, allowing them to produce work of improved quality. There are an increasing number of opportunities for pupils to develop responsibility and leadership. Pupils elect members of the school council and there are also active contributions from pupils through the worship council.
- Pupils enter Year 1 with outcomes that are similar to those seen nationally. Nevertheless a minority of them have not mastered correct letter formation and spelling of key words. This prevents them from writing fluently as they move up the school. This said, in the Reception class they make good progress from their starting points. Your early years coordinator and literacy coordinator are aware of this and have already put plans in place to address children's early writing and spelling skills.
- The youngest disadvantaged pupils make swift progress. Over the past two years, many of them have been lower attainers needing to catch up. A large majority of them had special educational needs and/or disabilities and required additional support. These pupils were well supported and made good progress but did not attain a good level of development.
- In the early years foundation stage, a well-thought-out curriculum with plenty of opportunity to learn outdoors enables children to achieve well in all areas of learning. Very detailed records are kept about how well children are learning with good-quality evidence collected to support teachers' judgements about attainment and progress. Outcomes judgements were moderated by the local authority and were proved to be fair and accurate.
- Parents are very pleased with the detailed learning journals that they receive at the end of the year because they record and celebrate all their children's achievements.
- All teachers effectively adapt learning activities to meet the varying needs of the pupils so that they achieve well. They deploy teaching assistants effectively to support pupils in their learning. Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning due to the firm yet sensitive support provided by all staff.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to read, write and apply their mathematical skills in other subjects. For example, pupils in Year 4 research, calculate and write about how far food has travelled from different parts of the world to their local supermarket. They write prayers thanking God for all the food that they eat, praying for those countries where food is scarce due to wars and natural disasters.
- Leadership is strong and effective. Middle leaders are enthusiastic and effective

in their work. They make appropriate adjustments to the curriculum to ensure that pupils have equality of opportunity, especially in providing opportunities for pupils to practise reading, writing and mathematical skills in other subjects. For example, in Year 5, pupils wrote at length about the gifts that scientists have left the world, for example the discovery of penicillin. High-quality artwork supports learning in all subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- leaders continue to work with parents of the minority of pupils who are late or absent from school
- leaders review the way in which phonics is taught so that a greater proportion of Year 1 pupils attain the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check, and improve pupils' spelling and writing skills, especially in key stage 1
- children in the early years foundation stage form their letters correctly
- they implement the plans currently in place to ensure that a greater proportion of Year 6 pupils work at greater depth in reading and more Year 2 pupils of middle ability reach age-related expectations in writing
- the school development plan is succinct and that the impact of actions taken on school outcomes is explicit.

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

Yours sincerely

Bogusia Matusiak-Varley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy and middle leaders with responsibility for literacy, numeracy, the early years foundation stage and special educational needs. I spoke to 10 parents and two members of the governing body. I talked with small groups of pupils formally and informally around the school and in lessons. In addition, I jointly observed teaching and learning in all classes, and scrutinised writing books from pupils in all year groups.

I examined a range of documentation, including documents relating to attendance, safeguarding and exclusions. I took account of the minutes of the governing body, reports written by local authority advisers, the school's self- evaluation of how well it is doing, the school's improvement priorities and the school's assessment information. I reviewed the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered 19 parental responses to Parent View.