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Ms Jane O'Brien
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Stoke Newington
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Dear Ms O'Brien

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Stoke Newington

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 May 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 and your leadership team have worked hard to create a school community where everyone is nurtured. Together with the pupils, you have established clear values that run through the work of the school. The school's values of love, hope, courage, respect and truth are understood well by pupils. One said, 'Teachers are so understanding and kind. They always listen to us.' Parents overwhelmingly agree, and one parent said, 'St Mary's is a tremendous school. It is loving, inclusive and happy.' As a result of this, pupils conduct themselves well and are friendly. They show respect towards adults and each other in lessons and around the school.

School leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and what needs to improve. As a result, you have prioritised the right areas. For example, you rightly say that some pupils' progress is being limited by mistakes made in calculations because they do not know their multiplication tables as well as they should. Furthermore, some pupils make persistent mistakes in their spellings when they are writing. This has led to strategies being introduced to help these pupils achieve. These are beginning to have a positive effect.

Pupils said that they enjoy the different subjects in the curriculum. This is reflected in the displays around the school and work in pupils' books. You make good use of

specialist teachers, and pupils enjoy the challenges that they provide. For example in music, pupils said that they enjoy learning musical instruments such as the ukulele and keyboard and going out on visits such as performing at the O2 arena, because, as one pupil said, 'It helps us to learn a lot.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training for all staff is up to date and is regularly discussed in twice-weekly briefings. Information is shared by giving 'points to watch' to ensure that all staff are aware of current safeguarding issues. As a result, staff have a good knowledge of local issues and those in the wider community, which enables them to safeguard pupils' welfare effectively.

Clear processes are in place so that all staff know how to report any concerns. Safeguarding records are detailed and of high quality. Records show that leaders carefully and swiftly follow up any issues, working well with external agencies to support vulnerable pupils.

The single central record is maintained to a high standard. Leaders complete all the required checks to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work in the school. They record these checks accurately on the single central record, which is frequently checked by governors and yourself.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school and understand how to make the right choices to stay safe out of school. Parents and pupils said that behaviour is good and that instances of bullying are rare. Pupils understand about different forms of bullying including online bullying, and they know that they can talk to members of staff in the school if they have a concern. Leaders have developed a strong safeguarding culture in the school and have robust systems to support this.

Inspection findings

- The first key line of enquiry focused on how successfully leaders are supporting teachers in challenging more boys to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1. This is because in 2016 boys did not make as much progress as girls in these subjects.
- You and your leadership team were quick to identify this and have implemented new and improved strategies to secure more rapid progress. In lessons, teachers accurately model how to read, which results in boys reading with expression and observing punctuation correctly.
- Work in boys' books shows that recent developments have resulted in more rapid progress. For example, by teachers explicitly teaching handwriting skills, boys have been helped routinely to present their work neatly. Boys quickly improve the fluency of their writing by using a wider range of vocabulary, and there are improvements in the accuracy of their use of punctuation. However, there are some persistent inaccuracies in spellings, which are limiting the progress of some pupils. Your leadership team has taken swift action to improve this, but you

agreed that some further work is needed.

- Teachers routinely build on pupils' prior learning in mathematics, which results in strong progress. Well-established routines are used to check understanding and offer regular opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding through problem-solving activities. Some pupils make errors in calculations as a result of their not knowing number facts well enough, such as multiplication tables or number bonds. Your leadership team is aware of this and has put in place strategies to secure improvements. However, there is further work to do to ensure that the progress of those pupils is more rapid.
- Observations of learning in classrooms, reviews of books, listening to pupils read and reviewing assessment information show that boys are now making as much progress as girls at key stage 1.
- The second key line of enquiry focused on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in phonics. This is because the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in recent years has not been as high as that of other pupils, nationally.
- We visited lessons where pupils listened attentively to explanations of new letter sounds. Pupils use the strategies they have learned well to read unfamiliar words and to help them read more fluently. Effective phonics teaching has enabled the majority of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to catch up with others. As a result, there is now a significant increase in the numbers of disadvantaged pupils on track to achieve the required standard in the phonics screening check.
- The third inspection focus was to establish how successfully leaders are supporting teachers to increase rates of progress in reading and writing, especially so that middle-ability disadvantaged pupils achieve greater depth in their key stage 2 assessments.
- Leaders have reviewed the teaching of reading, for example developing the quality of questioning to deepen pupils' understanding. As a result of this, pupils showed that they had a good understanding of the text and were able to express opinions about their choice of books. For example, one year 5 boy said, 'I like Tom Gates because the way the characters develop make[s] me laugh.'
- Your development of the curriculum offers regular opportunities for pupils to write at length and in subjects other than English and mathematics. This has resulted in more rapid progress over time, with assessment information showing more disadvantaged pupils on track to achieve the higher levels at the end of the key stage.
- Finally, we considered what the school has done to reduce persistent absence. Overall, persistent absence rates have been higher than national averages in recent years for pupils eligible for free school meals, boys and pupils who have special educational needs.
- You have taken robust action to improve attendance rates for those groups of pupils through the use of a range of new strategies. You have given parents regular and clear information about the importance of attendance and your high expectations. Improvements in attendance have been celebrated through assemblies and letters to parents. You have worked closely with families to understand the reasons why pupils are not attending school as frequently as they

should, and you have liaised with external agencies to support the work of the school. As a result, persistent absence rates have reduced and are now lower than national averages overall, and for most groups.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- mathematical fluency continues to improve for all pupils, through better knowledge of number facts, so that pupils, including boys, continue to make strong progress
- accuracy in spellings continues to improve so that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress.

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

Yours sincerely

David Lloyd
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the school's administrative manager and the chair of the governing body. I visited lessons with you and members of the senior leadership team. We reviewed work in pupils' books, including boys' books at key stage 1 and disadvantaged pupils' books at key stage 2. I listened to pupils read in Years 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and at playtime. I talked to pupils about their learning and talked to them informally in the playground. I talked with a range of staff. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school improvement plan, the school self-evaluation documents, safeguarding records, information about attendance and exclusions, and information about current pupil achievement. I considered 28 responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents and 10 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.