

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Dean Moran
Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Aided Junior School
Sawyers Hall Lane
Brentwood
Essex
CM15 9BX

Dear Mr Moran

Short inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Aided Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school is a vibrant and happy place, and pupils are polite, confident and well behaved. They are eager to share their learning and talk about the lessons they enjoy.

Governors are passionate about the school and raising pupils' achievement. They monitor leaders' work closely and provide them with effective challenge. Along with school leaders, they accurately identify priorities for the school in order to improve pupils' outcomes further.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked to improve spelling, grammar and punctuation. This was evident in pupils' work and in lessons. Work completed by pupils last year shows that these skills are taught regularly throughout all year groups. As a result, outcomes for pupils in year 6 in spelling, grammar and punctuation exceeded national averages in 2016. Outcomes are expected to improve again in the 2017 validated results.

Reading has also been a focus for improvement. Guided reading sessions are well organised, with opportunities for pupils to practise comprehension and reading skills. Inspection evidence confirms that teachers skilfully and precisely use questioning to encourage pupils to think more deeply about their answers. Pupils were able to identify the type of response required by unpicking the words within

the question to determine whether, for example, the responses to questions required opinion, retrieval or inference skills. As a result, the 2017 assessment information suggests that outcomes in reading will exceed the national average this year.

Mathematics has also been a priority for improvement. The previous Ofsted report recommended that the leaders implement the school's calculation policy and ensure that it is fully understood by parents. Since 2012, you have regularly held parents' information sessions to demonstrate the methods of progression for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division for pupils of different ages. This has ensured both consistency in the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics across the school and regularity in the support provided by parents at home. The number of pupils reaching the expected standard has improved since last year and indications are that this will be similar to the national average in 2017.

The school has extensive facilities for teaching music and physical education, which are utilised well throughout the school day and beyond. Pupils told me they enjoy sporting activities offered to them at lunchtime, and before and after school. The school's cross-country running club is well attended and has led to pupils achieving a high level of success in local competitions.

Pupils were keen to show me the vegetables they had harvested from gardening club on the day of inspection. Others talked enthusiastically about how they enjoyed playing monopoly at the lunchtime board game club. Parents too appreciate the wide range of activities provided for their children. One parent commented on Ofsted's free-text questionnaire, 'The number of extracurricular clubs before, during and after school is impressive and the work the teachers contribute to this is much appreciated.'

The majority of parents spoke positively about the school and the standard of education it provides for their children. I explored the progress pupils make as a key line of enquiry, and inspection evidence shows that, in 2016, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels of attainment in reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling, and mathematics exceeded national averages. The latest school information on the progress pupils make in these subjects is expected to be in line with national averages in 2017.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that the necessary checks are made on all staff prior to them taking up their appointments. Any concerns about pupils are raised immediately.

Pupils who I spoke with reported that they feel safe and that they were not aware of any bullying. They all told me they had an adult in school they could talk to if they were worried or had concerns.

Pupils have a good awareness of when they may be at risk and how to manage this

effectively. Pupils are taught online safety and are able to talk about the dangers. They told me that they know who to speak to if they have concerns. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View are confident that their children are happy, safe and well looked after, as are all staff who completed Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry concerned the quality of teaching and learning in writing. This was because in 2016 pupils' attainment was below national averages, with some pupils not making the progress they should from their varying starting points. Pupils' attainment and progress information this year suggests that the number of pupils reaching age-related expectations is still a focus for the school.
- You have identified that the school's procedures for assessing pupils' writing skills in 2017 did not enable pupils to have the opportunity to show their best work. Although evidence shows that teachers assess pupils' writing accurately, they treated assessments too much like closed tests. Therefore, pupils were not provided with the necessary support before, during and after the assessments. For example, before and during the assessment of their writing, pupils were not given the tools needed to use their prior learning, or given resources which would support them. Neither were they given the time to edit their writing after the assessment. Consequently, some pupils did not attain as well as they are capable of.
- The leader of English is a strength to the school and has already brought about improvements to the quality of teaching and learning in writing. You have checked assessment information with external advisers and with other schools in your partnership. You and other leaders recognise that pupils in the past have not been given ample opportunities to apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills regularly enough by writing at length across the curriculum. You have clear and focused plans in place to address this. Current pupils' writing is already showing an improvement, and there is consistency in teacher expectations across all year groups.
- Evidence confirms that teachers' and leaders' assessment of pupils' work is accurate. However, leaders recognise that teachers do not always ensure that individual pupils move on quickly enough in their learning, so that they can make the progress they are capable of.
- My second line of enquiry was to find out how leaders assess pupils' progress upon entry and help pupils settle into the junior school. You have developed strong links with the infant school which makes transition into year 3 seamless. Pupils settle quickly and confidently into junior school routines. One parent commented that, 'transition arrangements were excellent' and another said, 'I am very happy with the school for my 7-year-old, and it has been a smooth transition from the infant school.' You provide valuable support on the school's website to help parents support their children further. As a result, the school meets the immediate needs of the pupils entering the school effectively.
- You provide support for pupils who need to catch up. Inspection evidence shows

that teachers and additional adults support pupils very effectively. In a Year 3 support group, for example, the teacher demonstrated high expectations. Pupils were able to explain what a synonym was by drawing on prior learning to help them extend their vocabulary. The teacher modelled sentence structure and encouraged them to verbalise the improved sentence before writing it, reminding them of the essential punctuation. Pupils were enthusiastic, confident enough to offer answers and engaged well with the activity.

- In 2016, disadvantaged pupils achieved below their peers nationally in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. Therefore my fourth line of enquiry looked at the provision in place to support all disadvantaged pupils. Leaders' monitoring of disadvantaged pupils is thorough. Additional adults responsible for the progress of disadvantaged pupils liaise closely with teachers, ensuring that progress made in small-group support is immediately communicated to the teacher. Short, sharp focus sessions support pupils with their learning.
- You place a clear priority on pupils receiving support for their individual social and emotional needs. This ensures that pupils are confident and ready for their learning in class. You were able to provide evidence for individual pupils that demonstrates that, currently, disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- My last key line of enquiry was about how effectively teachers and leaders support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This came about because 2016 attendance information showed that absence was high for this group of pupils.
- The school makes reasonable adjustments to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities can access all areas of the curriculum. Parents are happy with the support provided. One parent commented, 'I think that the school not only looks after children with special needs but also those that are doing well.' Pupils are very well supported in class.
- The school ensures that all pupils are fully included. Additional adults work effectively with pupils in class, using additional resources and creative strategies to help them access specific areas of the curriculum, such as writing. The special educational needs coordinator was able to provide evidence that pupils are now making good progress and school assessment information shows that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made good or better progress in 2017.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders raise achievement in writing by giving pupils more opportunities to apply grammar, punctuation and spelling skills in their writing and more opportunities to write at length across all subjects

- teachers move pupils' learning on more quickly in lessons so that all pupils make the progress they are capable of.

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

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, staff and two members of the governing body. I also spoke with a representative from the local authority. I spoke informally with parents on the playground.
- I visited all classes. Examples of pupils' work both from this year and the previous year were scrutinised. I spoke with pupils about their work and observed pupils' behaviour during activities and as they moved around the classes.
- A number of documents were reviewed, including the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation, and pupils' assessment and progress information.
- I also took account of the 78 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire Parent View, completed by parents, 66 free-text messages from parents, and 24 responses to the Ofsted's staff online questionnaire.