

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Kate Parietti
Headteacher
St Michael's Primary School
Dee Road
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire
RG30 4AS

Dear Kate Parietti

Short inspection of St Michael's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 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 last inspection. In the short time you have been at the school, you have formed strong working relationships with staff, pupils, parents and governors. Parents particularly appreciate the time you spend greeting them in the morning. This is reflected in the response made by one parent who wrote, 'I have seen the headteacher many times in the mornings and she is very friendly and approachable.' Since joining the school, you have gained a clear view of the strengths of the school. You know what is working well and where further improvements can be made. You have worked with staff and governors to develop the school's priorities for the coming year. As a result, all staff and governors have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to ensure that the school continues to be successful.

The school provides a delightful learning environment for pupils, both indoors and outside. There is a very calm and orderly atmosphere around the school. Pupils are happy and they enjoy school. They appreciate the opportunities they have to play and work alongside those from backgrounds different from their own. They say that all pupils are treated equally and fairly and that discrimination on any grounds is not tolerated. Classrooms are bright and attractive and have stimulating displays of pupils' work as well as helpful guidance to help them with their learning. Relationships between adults and pupils are respectful and this inspires pupils to learn and to behave well. The curriculum is very well planned, with plenty of

additional activities that add to pupils' enjoyment of school. This reflects part of the school's mission statement, 'Through enriched provision, we will encourage children to fully develop opportunities to shine and share their strengths with others.'

There have been substantial changes to the school since the previous inspection. The school has expanded in size by increasing the number of classes in each year group. There are now two forms of entry in each year group except in year 6, which will be complete in September 2018. In addition to recruiting new staff, several teachers have left the school and have been replaced. Governors successfully managed a considerable building project to provide accommodation for the additional pupils. The leadership team has been increased to meet the additional workload. Many leaders, including you and your deputy headteacher, have joined the school since the previous inspection.

Against this background, the leadership team introduced the new national curriculum and assessment arrangements, while maintaining a good quality of education for pupils. Pupils currently in school learn well because teachers have high expectations and they help pupils to make the most of their school days. Parents are happy with the quality of education their children receive. One parent summed this up in her comment, 'I feel that staff are approachable, professional and not only make a positive impact on my children's education but are positive role models for life.'

At the time of the last inspection, school leaders were asked to improve the effectiveness of middle leaders. As a result of the expansion of the school, together with changes to the staffing structure, this has been achieved. All subject leaders have well-defined job descriptions and they know they are accountable for the standards pupils achieve in their particular subject. Although it is still early days, you have already gained an insight into where further improvements need to be made. You know that some pupils do not do as well as they should in writing. You are also aware that there remain some differences in the attainment of some groups of pupils. For example, boys do not always do as well as girls in writing and too few girls reach the higher level in mathematics. In some year groups, disadvantaged pupils do not reach the same standards in reading, writing and mathematics as other pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. You and your leaders are aware that a small number of pupils have circumstances that may make them more vulnerable. You have ensured that staff are very well trained to spot the signs that a pupil may be in need of help. You have established good relationships with external agencies to ensure that pupils receive the right support in a timely way. The new governor for safeguarding has already visited school to find out for himself how effective the school's arrangements are. He has checked that the school business manager makes the necessary checks when new staff and governors are recruited. The leadership team has ensured that all arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose.

Staff, parents and governors agree that pupils are safe in school. Pupils say they feel safe in school because there is always someone on hand to help when needed. Pupils have a good understanding of the need to keep safe when using modern technology. They know why it is important not to provide personal information when using the internet. Pupils know about different forms of bullying but say it happens rarely in the school. Pupils behave well in class and they move around the school safely showing an awareness of others.

Inspection findings

- In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, we agreed the following key lines of enquiry:
 - learning and progress of girls in mathematics
 - how well pupils, especially boys, develop their writing skills
 - the extent to which disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as they should
 - how well leaders and managers have sustained a good quality of education during the expansion of the school.
- From the observations we undertook, girls are now equally as engaged as boys in mathematics lessons. They enjoyed responding to teachers' questions and clearly understood what they were learning. Girls in Year 5 demonstrated a secure understanding of the difference between the numerator and denominator in fractions. They explained why a fraction in a given list was the odd one out and understood that sometimes there can be more than one correct answer. Work in pupils' books shows very little difference between girls and boys, although girls often produce neater work. This helps them to be more accurate in their measurement and calculations than boys, and so they progress well.
- The latest assessment information recorded by the school shows that girls in all year groups achieve equally as well as boys. Pupils are mostly challenged in mathematics lessons. Just occasionally, there are times, particularly during whole-class teaching, when the pitch of the lesson is too hard for some pupils and too easy for others. This slows progress for those pupils who are most-able and for those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- You have already identified that boys in some classes do not do as well as girls when they write. You and your senior leaders are taking action to help boys to improve their skills and this is beginning to bring about an improvement. You have strengthened the links between reading and writing to improve boys' skills, by ensuring that each class uses a text linked to the topic. This provides pupils with good-quality models of written language that help to develop their vocabulary and their understanding of sentence structure and composition. These class texts have been carefully selected to engage boys' interest, while ensuring that they also engage girls. One of the books selected is based on the life of Walter Tull, the first professional black footballer, who later served in the British Army in the First World War. This captured pupils' interest and inspired some thoughtful writing by both girls and boys. It also provided an opportunity for

pupils to reflect on and explore the social, cultural and moral questions raised in this story.

- Work in pupils' books shows that they write frequently when learning other subjects and this helps them to practise their skills. In most classes, teachers use interesting methods, such as drama, to inspire pupils to write. In some classes, pupils regularly edit and improve their work and so they learn from their mistakes. However, some pupils, particularly boys, have a legacy of poor handwriting and they do not always spell and punctuate their work as accurately as they should. There are times when teachers overlook basic errors when they provide feedback to pupils about their work. As a result, some pupils repeat their mistakes and this slows their progress.
- In 2016, fewer disadvantaged pupils than their classmates reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6. Provisional statutory information shows that in 2017, their standards in writing and mathematics improved to be similar to that of other pupils. While disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with their classmates, fewer disadvantaged pupils reached the expected standard in reading than other pupils. The school has taken action to address this. All teachers know their disadvantaged pupils and they track their progress carefully to make sure that they do not fall behind their classmates. Work in pupils' current books and assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils do as well as, and sometimes better than, other pupils. The leadership team has a plan to show how they intend to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. However, this plan does not identify the specific barriers these pupils may have. As a result, the most effective support may not always be targeted towards their specific needs.
- Leaders and governors have maintained a good quality of education while overseeing the expansion of the school. During this period of expansion, governors worked closely with previous leaders to maintain an overview of the school. This ensured that they took immediate action should they have a concern that the quality of education was slipping. New teachers received effective induction and support and leaders ensured that all policies and plans were implemented consistently. Consequently, the quality of teaching was maintained and pupils continued to achieve well.
- Since joining the school, you have built on the strengths of the previous leaders to ensure a smooth transition. You have reviewed the leadership structure and put into place a leadership team that has clear lines of responsibility and accountability. All subject leaders are held to account for pupils' achievement and they provide effective support to their colleagues. You have enabled less-experienced teachers to prepare for management by offering them the opportunity to shadow experienced leaders. This provides effective professional development as well as building capacity should any member of staff leave the school. Advisers from the local authority have provided effective support to the school to help them to maintain the good quality of education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers pick up pupils' basic errors, including spelling, punctuation and handwriting when providing feedback to them about their work
- there is sufficient challenge for the most able pupils and effective provision is in place for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities during whole-class mathematics teaching
- the specific barriers disadvantaged pupils may have are identified on the pupil premium action plan so that their specific weaknesses may be addressed.

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

Yours sincerely

Joy Considine
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and three other senior leaders. I met with three governors, including one of the co-chairs and I met with a representative from the local authority. I also met with the designated safeguarding lead officer and the school business manager. I took account of the 29 responses to the online survey, Parent View, and several responses to the free-text comments. I also considered the 23 responses to the online staff survey. I reviewed the school's website and considered a range of documents. These included your summary of the school's effectiveness and your future plans for improvement. I also looked at documents regarding safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. I visited eight lessons with you and your deputy headteacher to observe teaching and learning. I looked at work in pupils' books and I spoke to pupils at lunchtime and during my visits to classrooms.