

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



24 November 2017

Mr Stuart Pywell
Headteacher
St Stephen's Junior School
Hales Drive
St Stephens
Canterbury
Kent
CT2 7AD

Dear Mr Pywell

Short inspection of St Stephen's Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 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 have led the school with a high degree of resolve to continually improve the standards of academic and personal achievement for pupils. You have galvanised your staff team and trustees in united support of your vision for the school and the pupils in your care. Parents are supportive of you and your leadership team. One parent captured the views of many by writing, 'This is a fantastic school which provides incredible opportunities for all our children'. Another stated, 'We feel our child is getting an excellent, all-round education.' Parents are very positive about the school's work. Some parents would value more information so that they are able to do more to support their children with learning at home.

You and your staff have worked conscientiously to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection when the school was required to improve the standards that pupils attain and to accelerate their progress in English and mathematics. The quality of teaching has been a focus. It has improved to be consistently strong in all classes; learning is generally well matched to the needs of pupils. Pupils are increasingly building on what they already know and can do. You have fostered a growth mindset among staff and pupils so that potential is uncapped and pupils are increasingly aspirational. Pupils demonstrate perseverance and resilience as they tackle increasingly challenging work. In 2017, pupils performed above the national average in writing, maths and reading at the higher standard. The majority of pupils are making good progress in writing. Further work is needed to ensure that more

disadvantaged pupils make consistently good progress in mathematics.

You were also asked to support the development of middle leaders. Teachers have received high-quality professional development, training and learning opportunities. Leaders and trustees recognise the benefit of teachers working in collaboration to improve the overall effectiveness of the school towards outstanding. You have made sure that your staff team is increasingly outward-looking and forward-thinking. You intend to provide staff with even more opportunities to engage with colleagues from other schools. Leaders are keen to more closely scrutinise the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods in order to ensure that your initiatives and strategies are the best that they can be. Consequently, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

There is a delightful atmosphere in school. You and your staff go the extra mile to make sure that school is not only about learning in lessons. Pupils are proud of their school. Older pupils take their responsibilities very seriously. They took great care, when talking to me, to explain how the school develops them as individuals. One pupil explained, 'The school gives us experiences for the future; learning to fail as well as learning to succeed.' This is a good example of how you enable pupils to become confident and self-assured individuals.

You have identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You know that to continue to improve you need to ensure that all pupils always do as well in reading and mathematics as they do in writing. You agree that by clarifying the milestones for measuring success, responsibility for checking the provision can be shared more widely. This will help staff and trustees to take a fuller part in securing improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your colleagues have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust, and records are confidentially stored, and that they are detailed and of high quality. A recent audit of safeguarding has reinforced trustees' careful monitoring of this area. It has helped them to ensure that aspects of the school's practice in checking on adults employed to be with pupils have been covered well.

You are acutely aware of your responsibilities to protect pupils. You encourage staff to attend training regularly so that they can spot any abuse or concerns swiftly and understand their responsibility to protect pupils, including in relation to radicalisation. Pupils who are at risk are supported well, and the safeguarding team diligently pursues positive outcomes for the most vulnerable pupils in the school's care.

Almost all the pupils who responded to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire say that they feel safe at the school. When asked, they know how to keep themselves safe and have a good understanding of how to use the internet safely. They know very clearly what bullying is and say that it is extremely rare in school. Nearly all pupils feel strongly that there is an adult in the school that they can talk to if something is

worrying them. One pupil said, 'The teachers make you feel you belong, no one feels lonely in our school.'

Inspection findings

- During this inspection I considered what it would be like to be a pupil at your school. I found that pupils enjoy school and their learning. It is clear that pupils' personal development is prioritised by staff. Pupils have praiseworthy attitudes to learning and try hard to complete their work to a high standard. Pupils feel that their opinions matter. You provide them with ample ways to express their views and concerns, such as during their small-group and individual sessions. Because of this, they doggedly persist when faced with challenging work. They demonstrate perseverance and resilience.
- Pupils speak enthusiastically about the wide range of curriculum opportunities available to them. The pupils' work on display around the school is of high quality and celebrates pupils' writing across a wide range of subjects and themes. Pupils reminisce fondly about the many opportunities they have had to experience visits, visitors and trips with overnight stays. They value the chance to learn outdoors. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the skills that engaging in the forest school gives them.
- We looked at the quality of teaching and assessment in writing, and scrutinised pupils' work to examine pupils' current achievements. This was because pupils' attainment in writing was higher than their attainment in mathematics and reading in 2016 and 2017. By working with the local authority, you have reinforced your teachers' skills in making accurate and reliable assessments. As a result, the checks on pupils' assessments are carefully tracked, and teachers show confidence in using these to plan their work. The teachers' skills could be shared more widely with colleagues from partner schools.
- The progress of middle-attaining pupils in mathematics was not as good as for other pupils in key stage 2 by the end of the last academic year. You have tackled this head on. Aably supported by your deputy headteachers, you have carefully analysed the reasons for this, and have already put in place strategies to restore the good progress that pupils have achieved in previous years. These new initiatives need to be embedded to impact fully on pupils' progress. Work in pupils' books shows that middle-attainers are provided with opportunities to apply learning in a range of ways and are already provided with more challenging work in mathematics. Because of this, their progress is increasing and the proportion of pupils on track to reach expected standards and greater depth of learning is improving.
- Leaders are committed to equality and have instilled high expectations among all staff for the progress and achievement of disadvantaged pupils. You have introduced new strategies to support this vulnerable group of pupils in order that the difference between their achievement in reading and that of other pupils diminishes. School leaders and trustees have a clear understanding of the importance of this aspect of the school's work and are not complacent. They seek ways to improve disadvantaged pupils' life opportunities and to diminish the

remaining differences in their achievement compared to other pupils nationally.

- As part of this key line of enquiry I heard some pupils read. The current focus on pupils' progress in reading has been effective. They read frequently for a wide range of purposes. Less-able pupils have been supported to use their knowledge of phonics to read words unknown to them. They understand the importance of reading. One pupil told me that reading helps him think: 'I use my brain every time I read.' There is evidence that recently introduced strategies are already paying dividends. Helping parents to use these strategies at home would consolidate the improvements made.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- clear milestones for success are included in school plans, to enable staff and trustees to better monitor the impact of actions
- parents are given information about the new initiatives in mathematics and the new reading strategies, so that they are able to support their children with learning at home
- teachers have opportunities to work with colleagues from partner schools to more closely scrutinise the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment initiatives and strategies.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Lakey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other leaders, and three members of the board of trustees. I met with those responsible for safeguarding. I undertook joint visits to lessons with senior leaders to see pupils learning, paying particular attention to the quality of teaching in English and mathematics. I spoke to pupils in lessons, heard pupils read, and met with older pupils to gather their views about the school. I looked at pupils' writing, their mathematics, science and topic books, and viewed pupils' work during lessons. I took account of the 58 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 40 written contributions by parents, which were also made online. I met a number of parents at the start of the school day. I took account of 63 pupil and 26 staff responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about school improvement and pupils' achievement, and I examined safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I also

discussed with you and your leadership team the evaluation of the school's effectiveness.