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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Andrew Spooner
Headteacher
St Nicolas Church of England Primary School, Abingdon
Boxhill Walk
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX14 1HB

Dear Mr Spooner

Short inspection of St Nicolas Church of England Primary School, Abingdon

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your arrival in September 2015, your determination and ambition have inspired pupils, parents and carers, and staff. You are supported and challenged ably by senior leaders and governors on all aspects of school development. They share your vision that every pupil will succeed. Staff feel valued and work effectively together, rising to your high expectations. You have an honest and accurate view of what your school does well and what could be even better. Parents value your leadership.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They think their school is friendly. Pupils are enthusiastic about their work and keen to show how much they have improved. They behave well. The broad and balanced curriculum is enriched by many trips, clubs, sport and music opportunities. Many parents commented on how happy their children are at St Nicolas C of E Primary School, with one writing, 'I'm really glad my daughter attends this school. It has a lovely, inclusive ethos and a real sense of community.'

The previous inspection report recognised the many strengths of the school, including good teaching, good behaviour and improved progress. You have maintained these strengths but know that, in 2017, pupils' progress in writing at the end of key stage 2 was significantly below that seen nationally.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the level of challenge across lessons and increase the opportunities for extended writing. You have taken effective action to improve these areas. During my visits to lessons, I saw pupils collaborating well on tasks and showing strong resilience in their responses to challenge. They were keen to explain how they learn from their 'marvellous mistakes'. We agreed, however, that the level of challenge could be improved further in mathematics across the school.

Attainment at the end of key stage 1 in 2017 was above average. At the end of key stage 2 in 2017, pupils' attainment was higher than the national average in reading and mathematics. The progress pupils made in reading was significantly higher than the national average. Writing remains a suitable focus for school improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors fulfil their statutory safeguarding duties well. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose and day-to-day routines are secure. Communication between staff is strong. Pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of staff are in place. You work successfully with outside agencies to support pupils and their families. Safeguarding training is regular and up to date. As a result, staff and governors understand their roles and responsibilities well. Staff have created a very caring environment. As one parent commented, 'St Nicolas is a nurturing school where staff know the children well and care about their whole development.'

Most pupils attend the school regularly but the proportion of pupils frequently absent was above the national average in 2017. Leaders have been active in improving the partnership between home and school to ensure that there is an improvement in the attendance of these pupils. However, leaders are not complacent. They know they need to regularly review the impact of their work in this area to improve attendance further for pupils who are persistently absent.

Pupils have a strong knowledge of how to keep themselves safe online. They like the way there is always an adult to talk to if they are worried. They told me that there is hardly any bullying but if there is, teachers always help.

Inspection findings

- You have focused rightly on improving the progress pupils make in writing. Leaders have established a consistent approach to teaching writing throughout the school. Pupils are given many opportunities to write at length across the curriculum, with a clear purpose and audience. Pupils know how to improve their writing using editing and proofreading skills, as well as the clear next steps identified by their teachers. Pupils' books show that pupils are now making rapid progress in their writing. Pupils were keen to show me the progress they are making. However, we agreed that not enough pupils are reaching the higher standards in writing across the school.

- My classroom visits, including the scrutiny of pupils' work, showed that most pupils are challenged with appropriate tasks, especially in reading and writing. Teachers' questioning is effective in assessing understanding and moving learning on. Most pupils say that they are challenged in their learning. You recognise the need to develop the level of challenge even further in mathematics through increased opportunities for pupils to reason and problem-solve in their lessons.
- Leaders and governors allocate pupil premium funding to agreed priorities and review its impact closely. They have a good understanding of the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils and have a wide range of support in place. The home-school link worker is particularly effective in supporting vulnerable families. Most disadvantaged pupils are making steady progress in reading and writing. Where this is not the case, leaders and teachers accurately identify what would help the pupil to catch up. Currently, the progress that disadvantaged pupils are making in mathematics is not as rapid as in reading and writing.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. You check this by regularly visiting lessons, talking to pupils, and looking at their work and assessment information. Feedback to staff is specific and your expectations are understood. Teachers and supporting adults work effectively in classrooms to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. Their subject knowledge is strong. As a result of your delegated leadership model, the capacity for further improvements is strong. Phase leaders are taking an increasing responsibility to improve teaching further, and they value their opportunities to lead school development.
- Governors have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They carry out their statutory duties well. Governors support and challenge you effectively. They work with you to set the strategic direction of the school and play a full part in monitoring its effectiveness.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have increasing opportunities to reason and solve problems in mathematics, in order to deepen their understanding and accelerate their progress
- more of the most able pupils attain the higher standards in writing in all year groups
- they continue to improve the attendance of those pupils who are persistently absent.

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

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy to discuss the school's effectiveness. Together, we visited lessons to observe pupils' learning, speak to pupils and look at their work. Alongside the mathematics and English leaders, we assessed the quality of pupils' work in books. I met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke to pupils about their school. I considered 119 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the accompanying free-text comments. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Staff questionnaires were also considered. I spoke with representatives of the local authority and the diocese. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documentation, including your self-evaluation and improvement planning, pupils' progress information, local authority reports and policies, was examined.