

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



22 February 2018

Mrs Cathy Gouldstone
Headteacher
North Marston Church of England School
School Hill
North Marston
Buckingham
Buckinghamshire
MK18 3PE

Dear Mrs Gouldstone

Short inspection of North Marston Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The school's Christian values and vision for pupils to 'love learning and truly care' are woven through the work of the school. Pupils have highly positive attitudes to learning, respect and care for each other and value their unique qualities. They behave beautifully and the school is a purposeful, happy, thriving community. Pupils are immensely proud to belong to the school and greatly appreciate being part of a small village school. They enthuse about the opportunities they have to play and learn with pupils from different year groups, such as by being 'reading buddies'. Parents and carers wholeheartedly support the school and are overwhelming in their praise. As one parent commented, 'My children have flourished and grown in confidence since attending the school.'

Children get off to a super start in the early years. They achieve well and settle quickly into school life. Over time, pupils make good progress and, by the end of key stage 2, they achieve standards which are above the national average. The most able pupils also achieve well. In 2017, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils achieved the higher standards in key stages 1 and 2. However, in recent years, attainment in key stage 1 has been more variable, particularly in reading and writing. While most pupils are now making good progress in these subjects, you have identified that some middle-attaining pupils are not progressing quite as quickly as they could.

Staff and governors work very effectively together as a united team, determined to ensure the very best for all pupils at North Marston. Governors provide a strong, strategic steer and a good balance of challenge and support to leaders. They have improvements to the school's website in hand so that it is easier to update, enabling all the required information to be published in a timely manner. You have a very good understanding of the school's many strengths and have identified the right priorities for further improvement. You have well-considered plans to improve reading and writing outcomes for pupils in key stage 1.

When the school was last inspected, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school. They also asked leaders to raise the quality of teaching to outstanding and to enrich children's learning in the early years. Although not yet consistently outstanding, the quality of teaching has continued to improve. There is some exemplary practice in the school, most notably in key stage 2. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use this to pose pertinent questions which probe pupils' understanding. They skilfully identify and address any gaps in pupils' learning, ensuring that any misconceptions are ironed out. Teachers plan interesting tasks and adapt these well to meet pupils' varying needs. You are not complacent and keep a careful check on the quality of teaching through your regular observations and analysis of pupils' work in books.

You have taken effective action to improve the early years. The classroom environment, outdoor areas and quality of teaching have improved significantly. Teaching is lively and engaging and children cannot wait to get started on their interesting learning tasks. Opportunities abound for children to learn by exploring the world around them. Adults are adept at harnessing children's natural curiosity, for example by posing questions such as 'How quickly will the ice melt in our hands?' The new electronic 'learning journeys' enable staff to keep a close track of how well children are learning. Parents also make valuable contributions to these by capturing their children's achievements out of school. Warm, nurturing relationships help children to settle quickly and feel secure in the setting. Your effective leadership has led to sustained good outcomes for children in the early years.

Since the previous inspection, you have embraced the revised national curriculum and used this as an opportunity to reinvigorate the curriculum and assessment systems. Your comprehensive plans, including the new mathematics scheme, provide a helpful framework, ensuring that the skills and knowledge pupils need to acquire are systematically planned. You have also developed rich opportunities for pupils to learn about the natural environment, for example through the school's forest-school work. However, although pupils have opportunities to learn about different religions and cultures, their knowledge of these is not as secure as it is in other aspects of their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The care and safety of pupils are your highest priorities. You make sure that the required checks are carried out when new staff are appointed to the school. Your systematic approach to staff training, including regular updates, ensures that staff

are well informed about all aspects of safeguarding. Governors ably fulfil their responsibilities by carrying out regular checks on the school's safeguarding arrangements. They have made sure that the school's internet system is appropriately filtered to prevent pupils from accessing unsuitable and unsafe websites. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to stay safe when online, through the school's effective guidance and extra visits from outside organisations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. You keep a careful log of any concerns about pupils and make sure that these are promptly referred on, when appropriate, to different agencies. You are alert to pupils' needs and potential vulnerabilities and enlist early help to support pupils and their families. Pupils say that they feel safe at school. Every parent who responded to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, agrees that their children are cared for well and feel safe at school.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on some specific aspects of the school's work, including: attendance; how well middle-attaining pupils in key stage 1 are progressing in reading and writing; the effectiveness of the leadership of teaching and learning, particularly in key stage 1; and how the curriculum meets pupils' needs and prepares them for life in modern Britain.
- While overall attendance is above the national average, in the past two years, some disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have had higher rates of persistent absence than other pupils. Your well-judged support and intervention have brought about sustained improvement. The small number of pupils who previously had very high rates of absence are now attending school much more regularly.
- Your assessment information and our review of pupils' work in books confirm that most pupils in key stage 1, including middle-attaining pupils, are making good progress. Pupils apply their phonics skills well when reading and writing. Over time, they develop stamina for writing and write longer, more complex sentences. Pupils' punctuation also develops appropriately and some key stage 1 pupils are beginning to use direct speech and commas in their sentences. The school's attractive library has a good range of texts for pupils to choose from and helps to foster pupils' enjoyment of reading. However, while most pupils are making good progress, we agreed that some middle-attaining pupils are not making as much progress as they could. You are, rightly, keeping this aspect of pupils' learning under the spotlight.
- The recently appointed assistant headteacher takes particular responsibility for leading teaching and learning. She has already made changes to the way pupils' reading comprehension skills are developed in key stage 1. This has included more regular reading sessions and refinements to adults' questioning of pupils about texts. There are other changes in the pipeline to make sure that pupils in key stage 1 can learn the craft of writing through the study of good-quality texts. Your focus on improving the quality of teachers' questioning in mathematics has had a positive impact and pupils are now routinely asked to explain their thinking and give reasoned answers. The assistant headteacher has introduced half-termly

meetings with teachers to check how well pupils are learning. Together, you provide good guidance, support and direction to other staff and keep the quality of teaching and learning under constant review. The impact of your good work can be seen in the improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

- The well-planned curriculum meets pupils' needs and interests well and makes sure that pupils encounter a wide range of subjects. The school's plans carefully map out the key learning objectives for each year group across a wide range of subjects. Children sparkle with enthusiasm about the many different subjects that they study. The science curriculum is particularly rich, providing pupils with plentiful opportunities to learn to work scientifically by planning and carrying out experiments. For example, older pupils learned how nutrients are absorbed in the intestines by seeing how jelly babies absorb water. Pupils also have many opportunities to apply their writing skills for a wide range of purposes across different subjects.
- Teachers modify the curriculum suitably to cater for pupils of different abilities. They set more challenging tasks for the most able pupils and adapt tasks for pupils who find learning more difficult. Leaders are mindful of the school's village setting and have established strong links with another school that serves a more urban community. This is helping pupils to learn about life beyond their locality. Talks from parents and other visitors about their jobs also help pupils to gain a wider perspective and learn about the skills needed to carry out different roles. However, while pupils have some opportunities to learn about other religions, their understanding and knowledge of other beliefs and cultures are not so well developed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they sustain their good work to improve the progress of middle-attaining pupils in key stage 1 in reading and writing so that more of these pupils achieve the expected standards
- pupils' learning about other religions and cultures is strengthened so that they are even better prepared for life in modern Britain.

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 Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with you, I visited all classes to look at pupils' learning and talk to them about their work. I also observed pupils at play during morning breaktime. I met with you and the assistant headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation. We also reviewed pupils' books and the progress that they are making. I met with a group of pupils from Years 2 to 6 and held a meeting with three governors, including the chair of governors. I also had a telephone conversation with the school's adviser from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust. I reviewed a range of documents, including the school's pre-employment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children, safeguarding information and other school policies and documents. I considered the 32 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke with some parents at the start of the school day.