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Mrs Caroline Burn
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Burn

Short inspection of St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 your predecessor 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 and senior leaders have continued to develop the good quality of teaching and learning since the school converted to become an academy in December 2015. More recently, you have recognised the value of working in a structured partnership with other local schools. The school is benefiting from the school improvement opportunities offered through being part of the Bournemouth Septenary Umbrella Trust. Nonetheless, you have been able to retain the unique identity of the school, which is particularly valued by parents. As one parent said, echoing the comments of others, 'The school is lovely and has a nice community feel. The teachers have really helped my children thrive.'

Pupils are keen learners and work diligently in their lessons. They appreciate the wide range of opportunities to learn different skills, within and beyond the school day, such as musical theatre and dance. Pupils understand the school's ethos of balancing rights and responsibilities. They enjoy the 'rights times' and also value the opportunities to take responsibility, for example as school prefects.

You have strengthened the way teachers use assessment and make good use of working with other schools in the trust to help you check the effectiveness of this. You track pupils' progress closely each term but keep in sight pupils' starting points. For example, a high proportion of children leave their Reception Year with skills exceeding those usually found for their age. You have rightly made ensuring that pupils maintain this strong achievement across key stage 1 a key priority for school improvement.

You have an open and effective approach to checking on the success of improvements you are making. For example, you recently invited a group of headteachers from the trust to monitor the school's effectiveness with you. Consequently, you and governors have a deep and accurate picture of where the school's priorities for improvement lie. We agreed that the school improvement plan targets the right aspects of the school's work, but does not enable you to swiftly identify which actions are most effective in improving pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. They are alert to any concerns about pupils and follow these up promptly. You maintain systematic and rigorous records and refer concerns to other agencies when pupils or families need additional help. The school's pastoral support team maintains good links with families. Pupils and parents speak highly of their work and the contribution they make to helping pupils feel safe. You provide 'drop in' surgeries where parents can meet directly with a school leader to raise any concerns they may have about the school's work, including safeguarding. School administrators ensure that all checks to ensure that adults are safe to work with pupils are completed in line with statutory guidance.

Governors fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively and carry out regular checks on the school's safeguarding arrangements. Recently, governors discussed safeguarding with pupils to listen to any concerns they may have. As a result, pupils are confident that the school building is secure. The pupils' understanding of fire alarms and the bells to signal lockdown procedures shows that they know how to act in an emergency.

Pupils value teaching they receive about how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using the internet. They accept that good behaviour brings rewards and are equally clear about sanctions for misbehaviour. They believe these are fair. As one pupil said, reflecting the views of others, 'those are the rules of the school'. Pupils say that bullying in the school is extremely rare, but is always dealt with promptly. Parents and staff agree that your approach to tackling any possible bullying is effective. You continue to tackle any persistent absence by pupils rigorously and take prompt action if pupils are not in school at close of registration. Overall attendance last year was in line with the national average.

Inspection findings

- The inspection examined the effectiveness of leaders' actions in improving the progress pupils make in writing across key stage 2. This was because last year, not all pupils made the progress necessary to maintain their level of achievement from key stage 1. You have taken a two-fold approach to ensuring that this issue is overcome. First, you have identified where pupils could be at risk of falling behind and have put in place extra support to hasten their progress. Second, you have enriched the curriculum and ensured that pupils are given interesting topics to write about and thus practise their writing skills.

- Teachers have a secure understanding of the standards each pupil needs to reach. Consequently, teachers are able to respond quickly when they identify from pupils' work that specific guidance is needed. During our visits to classrooms, Year 6 pupils were provided with opportunities to improve their previous writing and the guidance they were given was pitched appropriately to their next steps. For example, the most able pupils strengthened the formality of their writing in order to bring greater depth to their work. Other pupils improved the accuracy of their punctuation. In addition, all pupils are targeted for additional support beyond the lesson. As a result, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making faster progress.
- Pupils write frequently for a range of purposes. For example, in Year 4 pupils used a visit by an engineer who built bridges to write persuasively to either prevent or promote the building of a bridge in a local beauty spot. They constructed their arguments well, basing them on environmental issues and their local knowledge. Their sentences were well constructed. Almost all pupils wrote with a fluent joined handwriting style. This purposeful writing was seen across other classes in the key stage. However, inaccuracies in pupils' spelling shows that this is a weaker aspect of their writing. Despite teachers having implemented a new programme for spelling, this is not yet having the desired effect.
- I next reviewed the progress that pupils in key stage 1 are currently making in reading and writing. Last year, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was above national levels. This reflected their progress from the high standards in reading achieved in the Reception Year. Pupils in Year 2 are given regular opportunities to read with an adult in class. However, opportunities to discuss books and develop the reading skills of the whole class are more limited. For example, in reading lessons pupils practise their handwriting or improve their writing from the previous day. As a result, some pupils are not meeting the Year 2 expectations in reading, such as reading and responding to a text independently.
- You have recently begun a new programme for teaching writing in Year 1. Pupils are enthused by orally rehearsing as a class what they are going to write. This is improving their vocabulary and the structure of their sentences. When sharing the story, pupils read together and develop their expression. When they retold the story of Grace Darling, for instance, pupils ordered the information accurately and enlivened their writing with interesting adjectives. This programme has not been in place long enough for it to have had an impact on standards of writing across the key stage. Consequently, you have provided pupils in Year 2 with more support to continue the improvement in their writing.
- Lastly, I looked at ways in which leaders ensure that there is challenge for the most able pupils. Through good professional development, teachers are now more aware of the expectations needed to reach the higher standards. In lessons and interventions, teachers are giving pupils the support they require and assessments show that the most able pupils are making strong progress. In mathematics, teachers now ensure that pupils who quickly grasp new learning move on and independently apply their skills. The new initiatives for writing are also providing deeper opportunities for the most able pupils to express their ideas.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- strengthen the focus on improving pupils' spelling in key stage 2 so that standards in writing continue to rise
- continue to improve pupils' progress in key stage 1 in reading and writing so that greater proportions achieve the expected standard
- refine the school's development plans to include clear milestones and targets thus enabling leaders to evaluate the difference their actions are making in raising standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Marriott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I also met with a group of three governors and held a separate meeting with the governor who has an overview of safeguarding. I reviewed the school's safeguarding procedures, including discussing the school's practices with staff. Together, we visited lessons and scrutinised a range of pupils' work. I analysed the school's self-evaluation, including the information held about current assessments and pupils' progress. I talked to pupils in their lessons and spoke to a group of pupils to gain their views of the school. I reviewed the 90 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I met with parents at the start of day and took account of the 160 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 26 comments written by parents. I gained the staff's views on the school through the 30 questionnaires completed by staff.