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Ms Laura Kelsey
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Dear Ms Kelsey

Short inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since arriving at the school in September 2017, you have quickly won the confidence of parents and carers, pupils and staff alike. Your inclusive, welcoming approach, combined with a determination for all pupils to achieve well, have brought about improvements to the quality of teaching and in outcomes across the school. One parent said, 'Ms Kelsey has brought dynamic energy to the school and with it positive changes.'

Pupils enjoy coming to school and agree that teachers make learning enjoyable and interesting. As a result, pupils work hard in lessons and strive to do their best. Parents, staff and pupils all agree that pupils behave well, including at free times such as playtime. Pupils know each other by name and older ones look after younger pupils. This reinforces a culture of kindness, care and friendliness to everyone.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and improving although several staff are new to the school. Even in the short time that they have been in the school, new staff have established positive relationships with pupils. This forms a strong foundation for happy, calm, purposeful classrooms. Teachers understand their pupils' needs and plan lessons based on accurate assessments of pupils' learning. Lessons in English and mathematics cater to most pupils' needs, although just occasionally the most able pupils are not moved on quickly when it is clear that they have understood something.

The school's assessment system enables teachers, leaders and governors to have a clear understanding of pupils' progress and to intervene quickly if a pupil starts to fall behind. Progress across the school was stronger last year as a result of more effective teaching and better use of assessment information. Outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are improving. Growing proportions of pupils are doing well for their age in most year groups. This is something that inspectors asked leaders to improve at the previous inspection. However, although there have been recent changes in how mathematics is taught, attainment in mathematics is still not as strong as in reading and writing.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the few disadvantaged pupils achieve well and make good progress from their various starting points. Staff understand pupils' individual needs and barriers to learning and plan lessons and interventions to overcome these.

Children get off to a good start in the early years. Staff are skilled in engaging them in purposeful play. They use activities skilfully to promote children's learning and develop their basic skills, including in English and mathematics. Staff are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to help children solve mathematical problems, such as digging for numbers and shapes when playing in the sand. This has addressed another of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection.

Pupils enjoy a wide and varied curriculum which includes lessons outdoors in the forest area and visits to interesting places. However, the quality of pupils' work in the wider curriculum is not as good as in English and mathematics.

Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas in which it needs to improve. The governing body comprises people with a wide range of skills and experience, providing strong strategic leadership to the school.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that teachers encouraged all pupils to read good-quality texts and question them more deeply for understanding. Senior leaders have placed a strong emphasis on nurturing a love of reading in pupils. Teachers read to pupils regularly and lead discussions about aspects of reading and writing and the author's craft. Pupils achieve well in reading.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors have ensured that there is strong culture of safeguarding that permeates the school. Staff understand that keeping pupils safe is everyone's responsibility. Thorough training and regular reminders about various aspects of safeguarding ensure that all who work in the school are vigilant to any signs that a child may be vulnerable. All staff report and record any concerns promptly. Senior leaders engage with external agencies to safeguard any pupil who may be vulnerable.

Pupils feel completely safe in school. They have a good understanding of bullying in all its forms and say that it is very rare in school. Pupils trust adults to deal with

issues quickly and decisively as they arise.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in a range of situations, helped by visits from the fire brigade and the police. Older pupils learn how to ride bicycles safely. Pupils understand how to stay safe online, whether on laptops, tablets or gaming consoles. One pupil explained the menace that internet trolls present and how to avoid them.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on three aspects of the school's work during this inspection. The first was to consider how ambitious senior leaders and governors are for pupils to achieve the high standards that they are capable of and for children in the early years to exceed the early learning goals. Senior leaders recognise that in the recent past too few had achieved these greater depth standards.
- You have taken swift action to improve the quality of teaching, by placing a greater focus on equipping pupils with mastery, especially in mathematics but also in reading and writing. This has provided pupils with stronger foundations in their knowledge and skills. As a result, more pupils are making good progress. The proportion achieving the higher standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 increased in all subjects last academic year.
- Leaders have also placed a high priority on improving the teaching of phonics. Consequently, by the end of key stage 1, the overwhelming majority of pupils have a strong grasp of phonics and are ready to become confident, resilient readers.
- A slightly greater proportion of children exceeded the early learning goals in 2018 than in previous years. However, the school is nearing the completion of a building programme to further enhance the outdoor provision in the early years. Plans are in place to enable more children to exceed the early learning goals, especially in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Second, we looked at how well mathematics is taught in the school. Last academic year the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2 was below recent national figures. However, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standards in mathematics increased sharply in both key stages in 2018.
- Teachers understand the importance of providing pupils with a mastery of mathematics and strengthening pupils' confidence in this subject. This year, the leader of mathematics has placed a clear focus on planning lessons that give pupils a secure foundation in mathematical fluency and understanding. Pupils now successfully tackle problems and reasoning activities that require them to apply their skills and knowledge in different situations. As a result, pupils are making better progress. Greater numbers of pupils across the school are on track to meet and exceed the expected standards for their age. However, more work is needed to embed this fully in all classes.
- Finally, we considered how well the wider curriculum meets the needs of pupils and enables them to achieve well. Pupils enjoy a broad and interesting

curriculum that engages their interest and sparks their curiosity. It includes visits to interesting places such as Lewes Castle, Brighton Museum and Kew Gardens. In science, pupils plan and run experiments, record their findings, and apply skills learned in other subjects, such as English and mathematics.

- Work in pupils' books shows that the coverage of the curriculum and the quality of their written work does not match that seen in most English and mathematics books. However, senior leaders are extending the tracking system used for English and mathematics to the wider curriculum so that pupils can make better progress and attain higher standards in more subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements in the teaching of mathematics are fully embedded and built upon so that outcomes continue to rise and pupils achieve consistently well
- the curriculum is further strengthened to deepen pupils' learning across a wide range of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met regularly throughout the day to discuss a range of topics, including the curriculum and safeguarding. I had a meeting with you and the assistant headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation. I also met with some middle leaders during the day. I met with four members of the governing body. The chair of the governing body joined the meeting by speakerphone. I spoke with representatives of the local authority and the local diocese on the telephone. We visited all classes in the school to observe teaching and learning. Together, we looked at pupils' work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at playtime, and had a meeting with a group of 10 pupils. I considered nine responses to the staff survey and 36 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke to several parents on the playground at the end of the day. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, development plans and minutes of governors' meetings. I looked closely at the school's

safeguarding policies, procedures and checks, and spoke with several members of staff to test out their understanding of these arrangements.