

30 November 2018

Mr Andy May
Headteacher
St Michael's Church of England Primary School
Bothel
Wigton
Cumbria
CA7 2HN

Dear Mr May

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

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 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 December 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 your staff continue to provide a harmonious learning community. Parents told me that 'children love the school and we couldn't be happier with the community feel.' This was evident during the inspection.

You, your staff and governors have an accurate and reflective view of the school's strengths and priorities. Together, you are determined to improve the school further. You have high expectations of what you can achieve while being mindful and realistic about staff workloads. As a result, staff morale is high.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked the leadership team, including governors, to ensure that all pupils, of all abilities, have appropriately challenging activities. Following a dip in results in 2016, you wisely instigated the support of the local authority. The local authority has brokered links with an outstanding primary school to provide additional training and support for staff. The positive impact of the support is reflected in the ability of teachers to plan learning effectively to meet the needs of the wide range of abilities in each class. There was significant improvement in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. There was also improvement in mathematics, but it was not as strong. You are focused on embedding improvements in mathematics.

Inspectors asked that the most able pupils always be sufficiently challenged, especially in mathematics. Teachers ensure that these pupils are presented with more challenging activities. The most able often work with older pupils in order to provide them with more stretch and challenge. The impact has been an increase in

the proportion of pupils reaching greater depth at the end of Year 2. In 2018, this was higher than the national average.

Inspectors also asked that you set targets for improvement for your teachers. You shared with me the targets that you set for teachers and explained how this is reviewed. Teachers have high aspirations for pupils. Seven staff responded to the Ofsted online staff questionnaire and all strongly agreed that they feel they are treated fairly and with respect.

Children get off to a flying start in early years. This is because you have effective transition arrangements that allow children to settle quickly into school routines when they join the Nursery class. We observed skilled storytelling which enthralled all the children in Nursery and Reception and the Year 1 pupils. Teachers encourage a love for books and reading from an early age and throughout the school. Because there are such small numbers in each cohort, published data is skewed. However, the changes that you have instigated to improve the quality of teaching and learning are having a notable impact on the improvement in progress and outcomes of pupils across each year group. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education, both academically and also in their personal development and resilience. You encourage pupils' regular attendance. However, a small minority of pupils have too many absences.

Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school and they take pride in their work. They know what they need to do to improve their work and are proud of their achievements. Pupils who spoke to me said that teachers make learning fun. The respect that they have for each other, and the positive relationships fostered within the school, contribute to the good progress that pupils make in a range of subjects. You, your staff and volunteers inspire a love of learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated safeguarding leader, you make sure that staff fully understand their duty and follow systems and procedures for logging concerns. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children and you check on visitors to the school. You make sure that the promotion of safeguarding throughout the school has a high profile. You provide staff with regular training that is up to date, so that they and members of the governing body understand the current guidance.

Together, you and your deputy safeguarding leader diligently follow up all concerns and make sure that pupils are kept safe. You work well with a range of external agencies to secure expertise to support pupils' welfare. You and your staff provide excellent care and support for pupils and their families. You ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Parents told me that 'staff are outstanding in showing care and compassion for the children.' Evidence from the inspection supports this view.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I looked at the impact of the leadership of mathematics in improving the outcomes for pupils in key stage 2. We observed how effectively the leader of mathematics has established a whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematics. In Years 2 to 6, teachers plan appropriately for the range of pupils' abilities. The leader of mathematics has developed her skills in improving teachers' subject knowledge and teaching strategies. She has made sure that teachers and support staff have received training and support to improve their skills and confidence when teaching mathematics. As a result of skilful teaching, pupils develop a secure understanding of number and are confident and accurate in their calculations. Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning very precisely to develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. As a result, current pupils are making good progress in mathematics. Leaders have a steely determination to consolidate the recent changes in the teaching and learning of mathematics.
- Next, I explored how leaders are developing pupils' writing skills, both in English and across the curriculum. Leaders have developed a consistent approach to the teaching of writing. Teachers now select high-quality texts for class reading, which is linked closely to developing pupils' writing skills. Through our observations of learning and scrutiny of pupils' books, we saw that there is a systematic approach to writing. Teachers prepare pupils well in planning, drafting and evaluating their writing. Teachers plan work that develops pupils' writing across other areas of the curriculum, such as in history and geography. Leaders' monitoring of pupils' work focuses on how well pupils are developing their writing skills. As a result of these focused strategies, pupils are generally making good progress in their writing across each key stage.
- I also explored how well the curriculum is preparing pupils in this small, rural community for life in modern Britain. Parents acknowledged how 'the staff take time and care to organise exciting and interesting trips for the children.' You ensure that the curriculum offers an extensive range of learning experiences, including trips to towns and cities as well as exploring the countryside nearby. Pupils told me how much they enjoy opportunities to explore places that are different from their local community. They were animated when they recalled a trip to London and the many and varied landmarks that they saw. Pupils told me about a trip to Glasgow where they visited a mosque. On another visit, they also explored a Buddhist temple to get first-hand experience of the range of cultures and faiths in Britain today. You encourage pupils to grow their own vegetables and extend their learning by cooking international dishes. You and your leaders ensure that all aspects of the primary curriculum are covered and there is an appropriate balance between subjects. Sports coaches provide extra-curricular activities after school. These supplement and extend pupils' learning. Teachers ensure that topics are used to link subjects together and bring learning to life. Staff are highly skilled in finding ways to motivate pupils. As you state on your school's website, you encourage the school community in 'growing together in an ever-changing world.'

- Finally, I explored what leaders are doing to address the persistent absence of pupils. I was concerned about the number of pupils who had been persistently absent in recent years. You and your staff are meticulous in analysing attendance and supporting families to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Although attendance is in line with the national average, there remain a small number of pupils who have too many unauthorised absences. This hinders pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders consolidate the improvements to the teaching and learning of mathematics
- leaders continue to work with the small number of families whose children have too many absences due to holidays in term time.

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

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we observed teaching and learning jointly. I held meetings with subject leaders, members of the governing body and with you as the designated safeguarding leader. I held meetings with those who have been providing external support for you and your staff, including a representative from the local authority, a headteacher from an outstanding school and a representative from the diocese. I analysed 29 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and I spoke informally with parents at the school gates to seek their views. I also took account of 15 free-text responses from parents. I analysed the seven staff responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and I spoke to several staff informally during the day. I held a meeting with pupils and spoke informally with pupils during breaks and lessons. During the inspection, I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's development plans and self-evaluation documents; minutes of governing body meetings; safeguarding documentation; records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance; the school's website; school policies; pupils' work and their reading logs.