

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Nikki Cotterill
Headteacher
St Columb Minor Academy
Porth Bean Road
St Columb Minor
Newquay
Cornwall
TR7 3JF

Dear Mrs Cotterill

Short inspection of St Columb Minor Academy

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 2018 with Julie Jane, Ofsted Inspector, 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 January 2015.

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 has been through a time of rapid growth over the past few years. Significant numbers of pupils arrive throughout the year as more families choose to live in the area. In response, the trust provides extra support for leaders to help keep the focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for pupils. You ensure that leaders have clear roles and responsibilities and that there are teams to manage different aspects of the school, such as English, mathematics, safeguarding and inclusion. Staff respond positively to the improvements. All who responded to a survey said that they are proud to work at the school.

The previous inspection recommended that leaders continue to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders at all levels have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You provide the trust and governors with thorough and accurate evaluation of what the school does well and what it needs to prioritise next.

The school development plan clearly sets out the need to continue to improve outcomes for pupils, particularly the most able and for disadvantaged pupils. Rather than rush at the first idea, there has been careful thought about how staff can challenge and support pupils even more. You encourage staff to be curious so that they explore, understand and support the gaps in pupils' knowledge.

For example, attainment in mathematics by the end of key stage 2 has been below national averages over the past three years. To improve the quality of teaching in mathematics, leaders analyse pupils' work in lessons and books. This reveals that pupils need to become more fluent at recalling number facts and to have more chances to use these facts to solve problems. In mathematics fluency lessons, pupils now use new, fun resources to learn and practise number facts. You can show that already more pupils are able to recall their times tables.

In addition, a character pops up in pupils' mathematics lessons to pose tricky mathematical problems for pupils to solve. Pupils' books and your recent assessment information show that this extra challenge is helping pupils to make better progress in mathematics.

The previous inspection also recommended that the teaching of phonics and spelling, grammar and punctuation improves. The leadership team's careful checking of the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 1 has ensured that phonics outcomes have risen over the past three years. However, you have not seen similar improvements in spelling across key stage 2. The English team have introduced new resources and guidance for teachers to support this, but it is too soon to see the impact in pupils' writing.

You frequently invite parents in to take part in learning events, for example Year 2 parents filled the hall at a recent Indian tea party that was organised to show parents the work that pupils had completed as part of 'our world' project. Most parents respond positively to surveys when asked about the school. Regular forums provide parents with opportunities to raise any concerns with you.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Members of the team work closely together to share information and to constantly reflect on their processes. Regular safeguarding checks from the chief executive officer of the trust and governors promote further developments to ensure that pupils at the school are safe.

There are thorough recruitment processes which are checked and recorded on the school's single central record. Safeguarding training is organised well so that staff have up-to-date information that helps them to notice and report any signs of concern. Pupils told us that they feel safe at school and enjoy their learning.

Inspection findings

- We looked at how you are improving attendance as it has consistently been below national averages. A priority in the school's development plan is to improve attendance. Your detailed analysis of attendance shows that holidays taken in term time and pupils arriving late to school are two main areas for lower attendance across the school. There are some signs of improvement following

moves to increase communication with parents as soon as attendance or lateness becomes a concern.

- Outcomes for pupils in writing across the school have not improved as you would like over the past years, particularly for the most able pupils. We looked at the work you are doing to ensure that the most able pupils, particularly in writing, are achieving as they should. The walls around the school show and celebrate good examples of writing by pupils. Improving pupils' vocabulary is a current focus. There are strings of interesting words for pupils to select for their writing, and further vocabulary work comes from learning a 'word of the week'.
- The English team have analysed writing in each year group and provided precise guidance for staff about how to challenge and improve writing for the most able pupils. Pupils' writing in their English books shows that these initiatives are starting to help pupils to write with more confidence. However, there are inconsistencies in the expectations teachers have for pupils when writing across subjects. Therefore, writing in history, geography and other subjects often does not match the quality of writing achieved in their writing lessons.
- We also looked at whether the actions to support disadvantaged pupils, particularly in key stage 2, are helping pupils to catch up well. You have introduced a new approach to support pupils with extra help as they need it. This is based on a daily assessment of how well pupils have understood their learning in English and mathematics each day. The aim is to provide immediate extra teaching to help pupils' misunderstandings.
- Staff also use these sessions to look ahead and prepare pupils for vocabulary and concepts that are coming up. The aim is to support pupils to be ready for their learning so that they do not get caught out by words or ideas that they do not understand. Current assessments show that more disadvantaged pupils are making good progress this year than have done in previous years.
- To provide checks on whether disadvantaged pupils are making good progress over time, there is a plan for a new individual plan for each pupil, showing specific targets and strategies. This is not yet part of everyday practice.
- We explored how well the trust and governors ensure that outcomes for pupils continue to improve. The trust has an accurate view of the school's performance. There are regular external reviews to check that the school's own evaluation is accurate. The chief executive officer provides challenge to leaders to ensure that the school keeps a focus on the current priorities. The trust provides extra support from education advisers, and this helps leaders to check the difference that new initiatives are having on outcomes for pupils.
- Governors know the school well as they visit frequently and take time to understand the strengths and weaknesses. They provide appropriate challenge to leaders to ensure that the school continues to improve outcomes for pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance improves so that more pupils attend well, and overall school

attendance is above national averages

- they continue to check carefully that the strategies to improve progress and attainment for the most able and for disadvantaged pupils are effective
- expectations for writing are consistent across subjects so that pupils are challenged to improve their writing, including their spelling, whenever they write.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Both inspectors had meetings with leaders during the day and worked with leaders to visit learning in classes across the school. We also looked at samples of pupils' workbooks. An inspector met with a group of pupils to gather their views.

A range of school documents were scrutinised, including the school improvement plan and assessment information. An inspector met with the safeguarding and inclusion teams to discuss safeguarding and attendance.

Further meetings were held with governors, the chief executive officer and other representatives from the Atlantic Centre of Excellence Multi-Academy Trust.

Inspectors listened to parents' views at the start of the day and took the 103 responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, and the free-text responses into account. Other surveys completed by the school were considered. The 46 responses to an online survey for staff were also considered.