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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Marcus West
Head of School
St Catherine's CofE Nursery & Primary School
Musket Road
Heathfield
Newton Abbot
Devon
TQ12 6SB

Dear Mr West

Short inspection of St Catherine's CofE Nursery & Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 January 2019, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have developed a bespoke and inclusive culture, based around the school's core values of 'Justice, Compassion, Perseverance, Courage and Friendship'. These values are rooted in all areas of your work across the school. As a result, a very positive learning environment promotes pupils' well-being and good academic and personal development in all classes.

School leaders, governors and the federation hold an accurate, shared picture of the school's effectiveness. This is supporting planning for even further improvement in the quality of teaching. This academic year, you have injected an additional urgency into school improvement. This is evident in your successful efforts to transform rapidly the quality of teaching and learning in reading from a weakness into a relative strength.

You and your staff have valued and responded well to the training and support given to you by the local authority and colleagues across the federation. Equally, you and several of your staff support partner schools in the trust. For example, you share expertise in early years and in supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to help develop and improve their provision.

Children continue to thrive and achieve well in the Nursery and Reception classes. Good progress, including in phonics, continues across key stage 1. Over time, pupils' progress in reading through key stage 2 has not matched their more positive

progress in mathematics and writing. However, as a result of better teaching and decisive action taken by leaders, all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils are now making improved progress in all these subjects, including reading. Pupils behave well in class and around the school. They respond positively to teachers' high expectations and relish offering and explaining their ideas. These qualities, alongside their growing self-confidence, underpin successful learning. Staff work well with parents and carers and communication is good. The large majority of parents who responded to Parent View would recommend the school and are similarly appreciative of all aspects of the school's work. For example, one parent reflected the views of most by writing, 'The school is a great community. My son is very happy there and doing really well.'

You and your leadership team have responded well to the areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection. You have ensured that the curriculum across the school enables all pupils to learn effectively in all subjects. This is evident in the pupils' enjoyment of school and their fascination with the stimulating learning topics provided for them, such as making space diaries. As one parent wrote, 'My daughter loves going to school every day.' Similarly, you have strengthened the teaching of punctuation and grammar and accelerated pupils' progress in writing across key stage 1. Your work in raising the challenge provided for the most able pupils has been effective. As a result, increasing proportions of pupils are reaching the higher standard in English and mathematics. Your school improvement plan rightly identifies sustaining this improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school leadership team, including governors and other leaders across the federation, ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. As a result, staff are well trained. They understand the symptoms of neglect and are swift to identify signs of abuse. The school's records show that leaders are thorough in their communications with external agencies and parents. Leadership and administrative staff, aided by governors, sustain an exemplary single central record of staff recruitment and vetting checks.

Pupils say that they feel safe and that, 'we talk to an adult, if anything is worrying us.' These trusting relationships between staff and pupils are a key factor in pupils feeling safe. Pupils also say that they know how to help themselves and others to stay safe, for example 'when using computers'. The large majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire expressed the view that their children feel safe in school. As one parent typically wrote: 'This school is what a primary school should be... a place where children can fall in love with learning in a fun, encouraging, colourful, safe and happy environment.' A very small number of parents expressed concerns about the past behaviour of individual pupils. School records and letters to parents show that, on the infrequent occasions when issues arose, the school addressed them diligently.

Inspection findings

- In recent years, pupils' progress and attainment in reading by the end of key stage 2 have remained below average. Consequently, the first line of enquiry considered how effectively leaders were improving pupils' reading skills.
- You have intensified and improved the teaching and learning of reading since the beginning of this academic year. Pupils of all ages and ability are responding extremely well to the range of strategies teachers use to advance their reading skills. For example, you have enlisted the help of parents in widening pupils' opportunities to read by supporting them at home. You have enthused pupils by increasing the range of books available and rewarding frequent reading.
- Your re-structuring of the timetable and the teaching of reading now sustains a powerful daily focus on the development of pupils' reading skills. Pupils in all classes are making strong progress in reading. They are deepening their comprehension and skills of inference in response to the school's wide-ranging strategies. Visits to classrooms showed pupils in Years 4 and 5 eagerly tackling reading challenges on laptop computers. Other pupils sustained concentration when seeking adjectives and adverbs in stimulating texts. Pupils in Year 6 responded well to the teacher's challenging questioning. They showed deepened understanding in defining vocabulary and explaining differences between words such as 'affecting' and 'effecting'.
- Key stage 2 pupils who read to me further demonstrated a love of reading and real interest in stories. Most showed skills of reading comprehension matching those expected for their age, with some on course to exceed them. The school's assessments also show pupils' rapidly improving ability to read.
- The second line of enquiry explored how effectively leaders and teachers are increasing the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in their learning. In particular, I examined this aspect in mathematics and the development of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammatical skills across key stage 2.
- During the inspection, I saw pupils provided with a consistently good level of challenge in mathematics lessons. Pupils across the range of ability, especially the most able, relished expressing ideas and putting forward their own strategies to solve mathematical problems. For example, pupils in the Years 3 and 4 class showed a deepening understanding of factors when multiplying numbers. Pupils in the Years 4 and 5 class showed progressively deeper learning by demonstrating fast recall of multiplication tables. Similarly, work in Year 6 pupils' mathematics books shows more pupils working at greater depth solving long division and multiplication problems. However, pupils' topic books indicate limited wider development and use of mathematical skills across other subjects.
- Teachers in all classes sustain an effective emphasis on widening pupils' vocabulary. This is improving pupils' writing skills alongside those in reading. Pupils' work shows good development of grammar and punctuation to construct meaningful sentences accurately. Pupils in all classes respond well to interesting texts, for example in Year 6 in exploring links to nature in 'The Promise' by Nicola Davies. Teachers' written and oral feedback to pupils is steadily improving their ability to spell words accurately. As a result, pupils' written work shows their

increasing confidence to incorporate more complex vocabulary, using words such as 'transformation' to enhance their expressive writing. Currently, spelling, at times of familiar words, remains the least developed aspect of pupils' improved writing.

- My final line of enquiry considered how well leaders and governors are improving pupils' attendance. Most pupils attend well. However, despite your best efforts, the overall rate of attendance remains just below average. Your detailed analysis of absence, particularly persistent absence, shows that this is mostly due to unauthorised extended holidays during term time. Your resolute and appropriate actions to reduce this type of persistent absence are clearly evident in your communications with parents. However, you acknowledge only partial success in working with some families to eliminate persistent absence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strengthened teaching of reading and widening pupils' reading in and out of school are sustained so that all pupils become enthusiastic and successful readers
- the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in mathematics and writing, particularly in their problem solving and spelling skills, continues to increase
- pupils' unauthorised absence is reduced further.

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

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the executive headteacher and with other staff who have leadership responsibilities. I met with members of the school's governing body and also held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I visited classrooms with you and we collected and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils during visits to classrooms and observed them reading and checking their work. I heard selected pupils reading and talked to them about their reading at home and in the school. I checked a range of documents relating to safeguarding with you and your administrative staff. We also examined details of pupils' attendance, pupils' progress and the school's self-evaluation and development plans. I took account of 31 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey and 19 additional written comments from parents.