

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Steve Butler
Executive Headteacher
Little Marlow CofE School
School Lane
Little Marlow
Marlow
Buckinghamshire
SL7 3SA

Dear Mr Butler

Short inspection of Little Marlow CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have led the school well through numerous changes in staffing over recent years. Your committed leadership ensures that all staff contribute to the creation of a welcoming and inclusive community. Governors, school leaders and staff ensure that the school's values of 'learn, grow, respect and love' are central to what the school does. This strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) provision is evident around the school, especially in the playground, where older pupils help the younger pupils during play, and in classes, where more able pupils in Year 1 helped others to read. Pupils are confident, articulate and well mannered. Parents, carers and pupils are positive about the support that families receive from staff to help them overcome any difficulties that they may experience. A typical comment from a parent who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that this was 'a cracking school where my daughter feels valued and safe'.

Little Marlow CofE School is a small school where the progress and attainment of each pupil has a significant impact on the overall assessment information. In 2016, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was above average. In addition, a high proportion of pupils achieved above the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check, and the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the early years was above the national average. However, you and your governors recognise that pupils at the end of key stage 1 did not achieve well enough in 2018. Consequently, you have taken urgent action to make sure that

pupils who are currently in the school make much better progress through key stage 1.

At the previous inspection, the leadership team was asked to continue to develop the quality of teaching to improve the attainment of higher-attaining pupils. In 2018, the proportion of pupils attaining at greater depth in mathematics at the end of key stage 1 was below the national average. Leaders have focused on the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics by participation in the 'maths hub'. During lessons, the most able pupils are encouraged to challenge themselves by solving problems, applying reasoning skills with confidence. As a result, pupils have grown in confidence to complete mathematical challenges independently.

Governors know the school well. They visit the school often. They are highly ambitious for the school and provide effective challenge that is focused on school improvement and on achieving the best outcomes for pupils, in particular.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff are effectively trained in safeguarding and know how to safeguard pupils. Leaders work very effectively with external agencies. Leaders are confident to take swift action where there are concerns relating to pupils' safety and well-being.

Pupils report that they feel safe at school and parents support this view. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of what to do if they need support around the school. They felt that bullying was not an issue in school but were confident that they could report it if it did happen and knew that the adults around them would deal with it effectively.

Inspection findings

- In 2018, the proportions of pupils in Year 2 reaching the expected standard in writing and mathematics were below the national averages. The school demonstrated that their approach to teaching mathematics is being used well by staff. Pupils in most year groups now have opportunities to develop skills in number and reasoning. Daily 'keep up' sessions have been introduced to further support pupils. As a result, leaders are confident, through their own assessment procedures, that current pupils are achieving well.
- Leaders are keen to ensure that the development of mathematical understanding is supported with the use of concrete apparatus and pictures before pupils move on to working abstractly. With the support of the 'maths hub', staff are using this approach effectively, most of the time. Teachers are using assessment well in lessons to help them provide bespoke support to individuals and groups. However, this work is not yet fully effective in helping pupils to make rapid progress in mathematics. As a result, the work is not challenging enough in some classes.
- An area of improvement from the last inspection was developing the role of all

subject leaders. Together with your head of school, you have worked tirelessly to ensure that middle leaders and staff have received appropriate training from across the Federation. You have introduced systems for tracking the progress of all groups of pupils in school. As a result of holding teachers more stringently to account, pupils are currently making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school.

- The proportion of pupils leaving the early years with a good level of development is above the national average. Adults ask questions that get children thinking and exploring. During a lesson observation on sequencing, pupils were encouraged to independently read sentences out loud using their phonics knowledge to help them complete their task. Pupils are motivated and engage well with the activities available to them. However, this is not the case in the outside classroom where there are fewer opportunities to develop these skills.
- During the inspection, we looked at writing across the school. Pupils are shown how to use correctly a range of punctuation. However, teachers' expectations in writing vary too much between classes and, as a result, pupils' rates of progress in English are inconsistent across the school. Where teachers provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their writing, pupils make good progress. Teachers do not insist that pupils produce writing of the same standard that they are capable of in English when writing in other subjects. They do not get enough opportunities in other subjects across the curriculum to apply the skills that are taught in English.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations of pupils' achievements, especially in mathematics, continue to rise so that pupils' rates of progress from their starting points are rapid
- pupils are given opportunities to apply the skills that they are taught in English across the curriculum, including writing at length.

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

Yours sincerely

Mineza Maher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held discussions with the executive headteacher and the head of school about the school's self-evaluation plan, current priorities and their plans for improvement. I met with both senior leaders to discuss the school's arrangements for child protection and safeguarding. I held a meeting with six governors and received input from the chair of governors via an email. I also met with a representative of the diocese and had a phone conversation with the local authority school improvement adviser. I talked to three staff members about how they keep pupils safe and their own well-being. Together we observed learning in all classes. I talked to pupils about their work and looked at a range of books, mainly related to English, mathematics and topic. There were 45 results from the pupil survey.

I evaluated a wide variety of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, pupils' assessment information, governors' documentation and records related to safeguarding. The views of parents were considered through the 60 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 61 free-text comments. I spoke to parents on the playground at the start of the school day. There were seven results from the staff survey.