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Mrs Margaret Gwynne
Interim headteacher
St Michael's on the Mount Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Gwynne

Short inspection of St Michael's on the Mount Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 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 September 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

There have been significant changes at the school since the previous inspection. The previous headteacher left at the end of the summer term and governors subsequently appointed you as interim headteacher in September 2018. A substantive headteacher has been appointed to take up the post at the beginning of the summer term.

You have led the school admirably as interim headteacher and have completely won the respect of staff, governors and the wider community in the short time you have been in post. With strong support from your deputy headteachers, you have articulated a clear vision for the school and a determination that all pupils receive the best possible education. You have set high expectations of what all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the high proportion of pupils who are new to speaking English, can achieve and how they should behave. You lost no time in swiftly identifying the key priorities for the school. This, combined with a strong drive for improvement from your senior leadership team and subject leaders, is ensuring that you are building on the school's many strengths, as well as addressing its weaknesses. You have not shied away from making some difficult decisions around taking steps to improve the effectiveness of some aspects of teaching. Nevertheless, staff feel positive about working in the school and are wholeheartedly behind your leadership.

You are ensuring that teaching encourages all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, those new to learning English and those new to this country, to become better learners. Pupils I spoke to were very positive about the school. They said that bullying was not a problem and, if it did occur, they were confident that adults would 'sort it out for us'.

You and your governors have a very good understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve. For example, disadvantaged pupils' progress in writing and mathematics has not been as strong as it should. Providing greater challenge for all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, in writing and mathematics has been a big part of your work with leaders over the current year, and this is now starting to pay dividends.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to raise pupils' attainment in writing and mathematics. It was also asked to strengthen the work of middle leaders and to improve pupils' attendance. I found that challenging teaching is currently encouraging pupils to make stronger gains in their learning. You are building effective teams throughout the school and middle leaders are playing a big role in helping the school move forward. However, there is still more to do to develop pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics and to ensure that pupils' attendance continues to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are kept safe and protected. All pupils, but especially those who are vulnerable or at risk, are kept safe as a result of strong pastoral and multi-agency work. Senior staff make prompt referrals of any concerns and follow these through in a timely fashion.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that they take effective action to safeguard pupils. Training is up to date, records are meticulously maintained and the pre-employment checks on teachers and other staff are thorough and meet all current requirements.

Staff make sure that pupils have access to a wide range of curriculum, pastoral and online guidance that ensures that they know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They are watchful of the needs of your vulnerable pupils and any that are at risk. Staff use the full range of information available to them to focus on pupils with the most need, including those at risk of low attendance.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the particular aspects of the school's work on which the inspection would focus. The first line of enquiry considered how well leaders are improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils in writing and mathematics in key stage 2 and in writing in key stage 1.
- In 2018, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in their writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was below the national average. In key

stage 1, the proportions of disadvantaged pupils working at expected and greater depth were above the national average in reading and mathematics but below average in writing.

- Along with your senior leaders, you have successfully raised teachers' expectations of the level of support they provide for disadvantaged pupils. Class teachers are now expected, in the first instance, to provide for these pupils in their classes. They routinely devote a large amount of their time to helping such pupils in class and providing effective interventions to help them catch up if they fall behind in their learning. This includes providing more challenging and demanding work in mathematics and giving pupils more complex writing tasks.
- Our learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work showed a consistent level of challenge and support across the school for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' work and your assessment records show that disadvantaged pupils are making strong gains in writing in key stages 1 and 2. Most showed good stamina in their writing, producing lengthy and well-thought-through pieces on a wide range of topics. Pupils are also making stronger gains in spelling. More are able to confidently spell difficult words that allow them to write expressively. Pupils' workbooks show a steady improvement in their handwriting. Throughout the last year, pupils have become increasingly proficient at writing for a variety of audiences and styles and using grammatical constructions more closely linked to their age.
- Across key stage 2, mathematical work is increasingly demanding. Staff give pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, opportunities to deepen their understanding of concepts and find new ways of applying ideas. Work in books shows that an increasing proportion of pupils are developing fluency in mathematics. However, pupils' mathematical reasoning skills remain underdeveloped. Too few are able to use their secure knowledge of number facts to solve complex number problems confidently and apply concepts they have already mastered to unfamiliar situations.
- The second key line of enquiry was to look at whether pupils in key stage 1 are making stronger gains in their reading, writing and mathematics. In recent years, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards or above in reading, writing and mathematics have been below average.
- You identified that one of the reasons for pupils' below-average attainment in reading is their poor development of language skills and a weak vocabulary. During the current year, you have introduced a range of strategies to raise teachers' expectations and improve challenge in reading and writing.
- Pupils who have previously struggled to use phonics skills to read receive precise additional interventions to help them make progress. Most children currently make good gains in reading across the Reception Year. Pupils continue to catch up in Year 1. Currently, approximately three quarters of these pupils are on track to meet the required standard in the phonics screening check. Many pupils of previously average or low attainment make strong progress in reading by the end of Year 2.
- Across key stage 1, mathematical work is increasingly demanding. Pupils are

consistently given opportunities to deepen their understanding of concepts and find new ways of applying ideas. Staff have responded with enthusiasm and determination to make sure that more pupils make stronger gains in mathematics. Work in books shows that an increasing proportion of pupils are confident at calculation but too few are able to apply these skills to solving number problems.

- You are making sure that there is a more consistent approach to writing across key stage 1. Scrutiny of pupils' writing showed the fruits of this approach. Pupils' greater grasp of grammar is leading to increasing fluency in their writing. More pupils are now writing with stamina and showing a sophisticated use of language.
- Another aspect I looked at was the impact of leaders' strategies to ensure that children in the early years achieve well in early reading, writing and mathematical skills. Very few children join the Reception class with the skills and knowledge typical of their age. Many children have poor speaking skills and so speech and language development is central to the school's work. Children enjoy experimenting with sounds and words and staff give a high priority to modelling speech sounds in words accurately. There is a precise focus on developing children's love of singing and rhymes and exploring books and early reading.
- Reception staff work closely together to share and confirm the accuracy of assessments of what children understand and can do. Gains in early literacy and number skills are being built upon, ensuring that a greater proportion of children in Reception are ready for their next stage.
- The fourth line of enquiry evaluated how well leaders are improving pupils' attendance. Attendance has been below the national average for similar schools in recent years, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders are successfully tackling this problem and have reached out to parents and carers of pupils who have difficulty in maintaining good attendance in an empathetic, yet uncompromising, way. Leaders have used a wide range of strategies to make sure that pupils attend school regularly, including timely telephone calls and texts, which are consistently followed up. This is helped by the rewards and celebration of good attendance you promote in assemblies.
- School data shows that overall attendance now stands close to the national average, and is higher than at this time last year. There is, however, still some difference in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others. However, the school has a good knowledge and understanding of the circumstances of each of the persistent absentees and does all it can to ensure that pupils' progress is not held back by erratic attendance. Despite this tenacious approach to reducing absence, more remains to be done to improve the regularity with which these pupils attend school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the improvements to the teaching of mathematics in key stages 1 and 2 are

consolidated and continued so that pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills are better developed

- leaders at all levels embed and closely monitor the school's pupil premium strategies so that disadvantaged pupils' progress continues to improve
- they continue to work with families to make sure that all pupils, but especially disadvantaged pupils, attend school more regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteachers, senior and middle leaders, governors and the school improvement adviser from the local authority. We visited classrooms together to assess the progress being made by pupils. We looked at pupils' workbooks and talked with pupils in lessons. I held a discussion with a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 and listened to pupils from Years 3 and 6 read. We considered the school's information on the progress being made by current pupils.

I looked at a range of documentary evidence. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance and its plans for improvement. I also looked at various documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record and examples of recent referrals made to an external agency. We also assessed current rates of attendance for specific groups of pupils.

I gathered views from parents and took account of the seven responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I received seven free-text responses and spoke to parents at the end of the school day.