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Mrs Paula Mann
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Mann

Short inspection of St Edward's CofE 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and is ensuring that the school continues to move forwards strongly. You, your fellow leaders and governors know the school very well and have a good appreciation of its strengths and areas for improvement. You have a clear, shared vision for St Edward's to consistently provide a high-quality, well-rounded education that sets pupils 'on a positive path for life'. Staff say that they feel valued by school leaders and are proud to work at St Edward's.

Pupils are polite and friendly. Their behaviour around the school and on the playground is consistently good. Pupils display positive attitudes to learning, listening well to their classmates' ideas and opinions and quickly settling to work. You have ensured that the small number of pupils who find it harder to manage their own behaviour are well supported, so that learning is seldom disrupted by off-task behaviour. Relationships throughout the school between staff and pupils are warm and positive. Virtually every parent who responded to the Parent View survey confirmed that his/her child was happy at St Edward's.

Pupils benefit from a broad and engaging curriculum based around a range of interesting themes and topics. Teachers skilfully link pupils' learning, for example developing their mathematical skills by drawing graphs in geography and science. Pupils are also encouraged to carry out their own research, which is providing them with chances to develop their reading skills in a practical way. Pupils say that they particularly enjoy the trips that they go on to further enhance their learning, such as

visiting the Roman sites in Chester as part of their studies of the Romans. Pupils are also very proud of the school's environmental work, which involves working in school and the wider community to promote environmental awareness. They take part in practical activities, such as litter-picking and creating floral displays.

The previous inspection asked you to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by developing the role that middle leaders play in school. You have done this very successfully. You have encouraged leaders at all levels, including teaching and non-teaching staff, to develop their skills through undertaking good-quality professional development. These leaders are then given the chance to use their skills practically, leading on different aspects of the school's work. Their work has secured improvements in areas such as early years, mathematics and support for pupils who need help to catch up.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and there is a strong safeguarding culture in school. Comprehensive checks are made on staff, governors and regular visitors to the school to ensure that they are suitable people to work with children. Records of these checks are detailed and of a good quality.

Staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training and all staff know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. The school makes very good use of an electronic system to record any concerns, and leaders work to ensure that any issues that arise are addressed promptly. The school works effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils and families receive the support that they need.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school and are confident that their teachers will look after them. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe in different situations, including when using the internet. For example, pupils told me that they knew not to access inappropriate websites and that it was not safe to share personal information with someone they had only met online.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of lines of enquiry. The first of these looked at how effectively phonics is being taught, as the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been below the national average for a number of years.
- You recognised that outcomes in phonics were not strong enough. You have changed your approach to teaching phonics, ensuring that all teachers use materials from the same scheme so that pupils are not confused by chopping and changing between different systems and styles.
- In Reception, phonics teaching is engagingly interactive and well matched to children's learning needs. As a result, children make good progress from their different starting points. However, this strong start is not currently being built on effectively in key stage 1. Here, teachers are less confident in their subject

knowledge and approach to teaching phonics and so pupils' progress is not as strong. This then has a negative impact on pupils' fluency as readers, as they cannot consistently rely on their phonics knowledge to help decode tricky words.

- The second line of enquiry focused on pupils' overall attainment in key stage 1, as published data shows that, in recent years, outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics have been stubbornly stuck below the national average.
- You have targeted reading as an area for improvement across the whole school, ensuring that reading is taught in a focused and consistent way. Initiatives such as refurbishing the library have helped to raise the profile of reading in school. Your efforts are having a positive impact, both on pupils' attitudes to reading, and on the progress that they are making. School assessments show a clear improvement in reading standards for current key stage 1 pupils.
- You have been similarly successful in making improvements to teaching in mathematics. You have worked well with the local mathematics hub, and your lead teacher for mathematics mastery is an enthusiastic and skilled practitioner. Teachers across both key stages 1 and 2 are growing in confidence in using new resources to deliver challenging mathematics lessons. Early signs are promising and pupils' attainment in mathematics is also on the rise.
- Two key factors in limiting pupils' attainment in writing in key stage 1 are pupils' limited vocabulary and a lack of accuracy in their spelling. Issues with pupils' spelling are directly linked to weaknesses in their phonics knowledge. The lack of breadth in their vocabulary can be seen in some of their simple word choices when writing, and also in their understanding of less familiar words in their reading. Teachers do, however, ensure that pupils develop an appropriate knowledge of grammar and punctuation by the end of Year 2.
- My final line of enquiry looked at how well most-able pupils are achieving across the school. This is an area that you had initially addressed following the previous inspection, but which became a challenge again following the introduction of revised, more demanding end of key stage tests.
- It is clear that the work you are doing in reading and mathematics is having a positive impact on pupils' attainment, both at the age-expected standard and at the higher standard. In mathematics, particularly in Years 5 and 6, most-able pupils are developing their problem-solving and reasoning skills and learning to select for themselves the best way to tackle mathematical challenges. In reading, pupils read a good range of books and are being given suitably taxing tasks to stretch their comprehension skills.
- In writing, teachers' approaches to developing and broadening pupils' grammar are not consistent. Some teachers explore language with pupils, asking them to come up with precise definitions and exact synonyms. This allows pupils to then use more complex vocabulary accurately to enhance their writing. Sometimes, though, teachers' expectations are lower, and this leads to vocabulary being used inaccurately, detracting from the overall effect of pupils' writing.
- Teachers do not provide pupils with enough chances to practise and develop their writing skills by writing at length, either in English lessons or through the rest of the curriculum. This particularly impacts on the most able pupils, who

become adept at writing paragraphs and shorter pieces with a specific focus, but who have limited opportunities to structure pieces of writing or to edit and redraft their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers in key stage 1 build more effectively on the strong start to learning phonics being made in early years
- teachers seek to broaden pupils' vocabulary and provide them with more opportunities to write at length, so that more pupils are writing at greater depth by the end of key stages 1 and 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you and other school leaders. I also had meetings with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I met one group of pupils to talk about school life and heard another group of pupils read. I took account of 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including some free-text replies, and a letter received from a parent. I also considered 15 responses to the staff survey and 38 responses to the pupil survey. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also studied a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.