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24 June 2019

Mrs Sophie Westerwijk
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Portbury
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Dear Mrs Westerwijk

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Portbury

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 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 worked with great determination and effort to develop key areas of the school since taking up your post in September 2018. This has ensured that the quality of education remains consistently good. You have put great emphasis on the individual child and what they can achieve and shown a real drive for improvement. Your support for other leaders, in particular, has led to high degree of consistency in teaching. Because of this, outcomes for pupils are improving. You have very high expectations of yourself, your staff and your school. Parents and carers recognise the effort you make to champion the unique qualities of every pupil.

The measures that you have put in place to address a decline in standards in 2018 are having a real impact. You have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas that are in need of improvement. For example, you have raised expectations by ensuring that staff put a consistent focus on the progress that all pupils are making. Teachers make good use of the assessment information available to them and have higher expectations of what all pupils can achieve. You and other leaders have also ensured that actions for school improvement have been monitored in a robust and timely manner. This has resulted in improved outcomes for pupils and teaching that is consistently good.

You make good use of the support that the multi-academy trust gives you. Additionally,

you skilfully guide and support your leaders. They make good use of the time you give them to monitor and evaluate the impact of their actions. This has improved the quality of teaching and, in particular, the standard of written work in pupils' books. The new vision for the school, which has courage, challenge, curiosity and compassion at its heart, is clear and understood by all. Like you, staff are passionate about the quality of care and education that pupils receive.

The school is a vibrant and happy place to be. Staff and pupils are very welcoming and proud of their school. Pupils of all ages, especially those who are vulnerable, show high levels of enthusiasm and engagement. Pupils confidently share their knowledge, understanding and skills across a range of subjects. This confidence and desire to learn has a positive impact on the progress that they make. The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school. One parent shared the views of many by stating that: 'St Mary's is a small but really wonderful school which truly nurtures children and builds their confidence and independence.'

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'Safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have developed a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures and use them appropriately. Governors make regular checks to ensure that procedures are in line with current legislation. Staff training for safeguarding and child protection is also up to date, enabling staff and governors to discharge their duties fully. Senior leaders make effective use of the school's electronic recording system and this ensures that records are well kept. Leaders work well with external agencies to make sure vulnerable children are kept safe. Leaders have also focused upon ensuring that pupils attend school regularly. This focus, together with robust systems, has resulted in improved attendance for current pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed. Pupils value the opportunities that they have to improve the school and to take an active part in the role that it plays in the local community. A particular strength of the school is the promotion of respect and compassion for others. This leads to strong relationships between pupils and staff.

Inspection findings

- Initially, I considered how leaders are ensuring that middle-ability pupils, particularly boys, are challenged in both writing and mathematics. In 2018, progress that pupils made by the end of key stage 2 in writing declined from the previous year. The progress that boys made in both writing and mathematics was below the national average.
- Leaders have improved the way in which writing is taught. Teachers are focusing in

more detail on the way in which pupils use grammar, punctuation and spelling in a range of subjects. They also ensure that written tasks have a clear and meaningful purpose. I saw an example of this when pupils were writing a formal letter. This provided all pupils with a specific audience and the opportunity to convey their thoughts effectively. Leaders have also focused on the way pupils respond to the feedback that teachers give them. Where this is best used, pupils are able to edit and refine the quality of their written work. Because of these improvements, boys are now making better progress in their writing.

- Leaders have made good use of the support that they have received from the trust and from a local mathematics hub to improve outcomes in mathematics. Teachers plan activities which are more focused on the development of mathematical skills and understanding. Pupils in key stage 2 say that they enjoy mathematics, particularly when they are challenged to explain their reasoning when completing more open-ended problems. However, work in pupils' books shows that they could be given this type of task more frequently. Because of the changes that have been made, the progress that boys currently make in mathematics is improving, but the rate of this progress is not as rapid as it is in writing.
- Middle leaders monitor their subjects effectively. They use this information to develop pupils' ability to improve the quality of their written and mathematical work. This is particularly the case with pupils making more adventurous vocabulary choices. Middle leaders have a clear vision for their subject and show capacity for continued improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning over time is consistently good.
- Secondly, I considered how leaders ensure that early reading and phonics are taught effectively in early years and key stage 1. I also considered how older pupils in key stage 2 develop these skills. This is because fewer pupils reached the standard in the phonics screening check than in other schools in 2018.
- Leaders have made good use of the support offered to them by a local teaching school to improve the teaching of phonics. Teachers benefit from the training they receive and opportunities to learn from expert teachers. Additional adults are used effectively to support pupils who are falling behind. Interventions are carefully planned so that the needs of the pupils are well met. Younger pupils are able to confidently use their phonic knowledge when reading and are able to apply this in their writing. As a result of these improvements, outcomes for younger pupils in phonics are improving.
- Teachers plan to meet the needs of all pupils effectively by using stimulating texts. We saw a good example of this in Year 3/4, where a text was used to prompt a debate. Leaders have worked hard to promote reading. Pupils respond well to this and make adventurous book choices. They then make good use of vocabulary and more challenging sentence structures to improve both their reading and writing skills. They are motivated about their work and this supports the better progress that they are now making in reading and writing.
- Finally, I considered how well governors hold leaders to account for improving outcomes for pupils. In particular, I looked at how current pupils, including a small number of pupils who are disadvantaged, are being challenged to reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Over a three-year period, the progress

made by disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 2 has been variable. This variation was most noticeable in 2018 when progress in both reading and mathematics declined.

- Governors are clear about the progress that all pupils are making across the school. This is because you have introduced detailed reports that enable them to understand the performance of the school. Governors routinely check leaders' assessments of the quality of teaching. They follow this up with rigorous scrutiny of assessment information and pupils' work. This has resulted in teaching which is consistently good and improved outcomes for pupils currently at the school. This is particularly the case for the small number of pupils who are disadvantaged, who are making better progress in their writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers guide pupils to improve their work in a range of subjects.
- teachers plan activities in mathematics which enable pupils to show their deeper understanding of what they are being asked to do.

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

Yours sincerely

Benjamin Jordan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you and other senior leaders, including those with responsibility for English and mathematics. I spoke to representatives of the governing body and senior leaders of the multi-academy trust. I made visits to lessons to observe learning, accompanied by senior leaders and talked to a wide range of pupils. We also scrutinised the work in pupils' books.

I looked at a range of documents, which included the school's self-evaluation and the current school development plan. I looked at progress and attendance information. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children. I took account of 78 responses to the Parent View online survey and the seven responses to the staff survey.