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5 July 2019

Mrs Patricia Gurton
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England School
Keen Close
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Dear Mrs Gurton

Short inspection of St Mary's Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 the school was judged to be good in May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your leadership and that of your deputy headteacher has been effective and you are both supported by a capable team of teaching and support staff. Clear direction and a shared and high ambition for staff and pupils have created a culture of success and aspiration.

Pupils' behaviour in class and around school is good. They are polite and friendly towards one another and have positive relationships with the staff. Pupils say that they receive helpful advice, noting, particularly, that, 'If you are stuck, they [the staff] help you.' Pupils are enthusiastic about the range of experiences that the school has provided for them, including trips to places such as the Space Centre in Leicester.

Parents and carers value the school's caring ethos and appreciate the work of your staff to ensure that pupils receive a good-quality education. They welcome the guidance and support that the school provides. Parents also value the time staff invest to think and plan how to continually help their children to be better supported in their learning and development. One parent said: 'Teachers think outside of the box and are always talking to me.'

Governors have good skills and expertise to monitor and evaluate rigorously the impact of the school's leadership and the pupils' outcomes. They are rightly proud of the school, as well as being accurate in their evaluation of the school's

performance. Governors are committed to, and ambitious for, the pupils and staff. They have produced a clear action plan with the focus on strategically supporting and challenging the school's ongoing development, for example in mathematics.

School leaders have successfully dealt with the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. You were asked to improve teaching by ensuring that work is set at the right level of difficulty. You were also asked to provide more opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English. Teachers usually plan learning opportunities that challenge pupils appropriately. This helps pupils to make strong progress, particularly in writing. Pupils use their writing skills well in a wide range of subjects. For example, during a geography lesson, Year 5 pupils wrote high-calibre pieces of work, using precise vocabulary, as they studied how environments are changing.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to strengthen leadership and improve the communication and the partnership with parents. Leaders have a secure understanding of the school's priorities and have selected effective strategies to address these areas. The school staff work hard to engage parents in pupils' learning and time in school. Parents I spoke with told me that the staff are approachable and discuss their children's learning and development regularly and clearly.

A priority for the school is to increase the level of challenge in some mathematical tasks. Occasionally, pupils complete tasks that are too easy and this slows the progress that they make. Inspection evidence showed that in mathematics the quality of questioning sometimes varies between classes. This means that pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong safeguarding culture within the school. Leaders carry out appropriate checks on staff to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children. These checks are recorded carefully and methodically. All staff and governors receive regular and thorough training covering a wide range of aspects related to safeguarding. Consequently, staff have a good understanding of the procedures to follow if they are worried about a pupil's welfare. Leaders ensure that any such concerns are followed up rigorously.

All staff are kept updated regularly. As a result, they understand and implement carefully the most recent guidance. You and your staff meet weekly and discuss all concerns raised about pupils. This enables the school to share the latest information about pupils with external agencies effectively and swiftly. Leaders follow up referrals diligently and monitor the impact of actions closely. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know who to go to if they have any worries. They also know what to do to help keep themselves safe in different situations, including when online.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics are strong because learning is planned well. Teachers use resources effectively in order to support the pupils' understanding of new and complex mathematical ideas. Pupils receive effective support and guidance as they tackle mathematical tasks in lessons and after they have finished a series of tasks covering a specific aspect of mathematics. Pupils' reasoning skills are good because they are asked routinely to justify their thinking. Teachers know their pupils' needs well and typically provide appropriate challenge for different groups of pupils. However, there is scope to increase the level of challenge in some mathematical tasks. There are times when questions do not probe pupils' knowledge and understanding in enough depth. Learning slows as a result.
- Leaders and staff have put in place strategies that have had a positive impact on pupils' achievement in writing. Teachers use a wide range of engaging texts to support pupils' learning well. For example, 'Kensuke's Kingdom' provided a good opportunity for pupils to explore different aspects of a character in detail. Staff plan effective opportunities for pupils to develop their skills by writing in different subjects. Teachers and leaders meet regularly to discuss in depth the progress of pupils. They put in place support for pupils who have not made as much progress as they should in writing. Senior leaders monitor the impact of this support closely. Boys who have not made enough progress historically, now make strong progress. This is because the teaching of writing is planned carefully to build on pupils' current skills. As a result, pupils have a secure understanding of how to structure different types of writing with increasing detail and chronology. Phonics is taught well, and pupils use their phonics knowledge to spell words accurately.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well in mathematics, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They receive effective support that focuses successfully on where knowledge and understanding is more limited. This enables pupils to make strong gains in their learning. Effective leadership has supported teachers and support staff to be consistent in promoting disadvantaged pupils' mathematical fluency. Evidence in lessons and the work in pupils' books show that pupils are confident with their basic skills and have regular opportunities to develop their mathematical reasoning at an increasingly advanced level. Current school assessment information also shows that disadvantaged pupils are making stronger progress in their mathematics than previously.
- Disadvantaged pupils' attendance has in the past been too low. You have ensured that there are effective systems to check pupils' attendance and punctuality. You and other leaders act swiftly when there are any concerns regarding pupils' attendance. School leaders challenge and support parents to improve their children's attendance. You work closely with external agencies to provide help and targeted support for families if their children's attendance starts to fall. As a result of leaders' actions, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are absent from school has reduced significantly this year and their attendance is close to that of other pupils and above the national average. This has impacted

positively on disadvantaged pupils' achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in mathematics teachers plan learning that challenges all pupils at an appropriate level, so that their outcomes improve further
- staff use questioning more consistently to develop pupils' understanding and extend learning in mathematics.

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

Richard Blackmore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, other school leaders, members of the governing body and two representatives from the Oxford Diocese and Buckinghamshire Schools Trust. I also had a telephone conversation with a local authority school improvement adviser. I also met staff and a group of pupils. I considered 62 responses from parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including free-text comments, and 10 responses to the staff survey. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work from a range of subjects and year groups. I also looked at documentation covering different aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding and the school's self-evaluation.