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Mrs Gail Burns  
Headteacher  
St Michael's Primary School and Nursery, Colchester  
Camulodunum Way  
Berechurch Hall Road  
Colchester  
Essex  
CO2 9RA

Dear Mrs Burns

### **Short inspection of St Michael's Primary School and Nursery, Colchester**

Following my visit to the school on 18 July 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 July 2015.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You and your senior leaders have gained the full support and respect of staff, pupils, parents and carers. Your staff are fully behind you in your quest to make the school a centre of excellence where pupils thrive and are well prepared for the next steps in their education. You meet the challenges of high levels of pupil mobility very well. A significant number of pupils are children of service families and spend less time at the school than their peers.

Your school improvement planning and evaluation processes are secure and enable you to identify the gains you have made as well as the challenges that remain. The governors told me: 'Senior leaders find solutions and don't just look for problems.' For example, at your previous inspection you were asked to provide pupils with more opportunities to think more deeply about ideas and solve problems themselves. As a result, you have established the concept of mastery and are encouraging pupils to broaden their knowledge and understanding through the tasks they are set and through the detail in which they are expected to respond to questions.

The school is an exciting and vibrant place to learn. Pupils are happy and, rightly, say they are kept safe. Bullying is a rare occurrence in the school, and pupils have a secure understanding of the risks associated with using social media. They are confident individuals who are proud to attend the school. They wear their uniform with pride, particularly those pupils who wear their distinctive purple uniform

indicating they have been specially trained as 'anti-bulliers'. Pupils are accepting of people's differences and are adamant that everyone should be treated the same. Kindness and being nice to one another are typical traits of pupils in your school.

Teaching is well planned and pupils are able to talk about their learning and, in particular, their progress. They know if they are on target or whether they are exceeding their targets. They are keen to attempt the 'hot tasks' set by their teachers as soon as they have developed the necessary skills and knowledge to tackle these confidently and competently. They have positive attitudes towards their learning.

Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, expressed many positive opinions about the school. One parent wrote: 'All of the staff are professional and friendly. They do a great job and seem to genuinely care about the children as well as delivering a well-structured education.' This comment is typical of the many received by Ofsted.

Governance is strong and governors have a good insight into the work of the school through their regular monitoring visits. They do not readily accept what they are told and adopt pertinent lines of questioning to 'dig below the surface'. Such challenging questioning is recorded in the minutes of their meetings. You work collaboratively with three other schools through your 'quad' system, using your partner schools to validate your assessments of pupils' progress and to share good practice and learn from one another. The local authority has confidence in the quality of provision offered by the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school's systems and procedures for managing safeguarding are fit for purpose. The strong culture of vigilance in relation to all aspects of safeguarding ensures that pupils are kept safe in the school. Staff have received and understand the key documentation and implement the school's safeguarding policy effectively. Staff training is up to date, including in the government's 'Prevent' duty. All the required pre-employment checks have been conducted and are appropriately recorded.

Procedures for raising concerns about pupils are fully established. Records relating to child protection matters are detailed and securely stored, and record involvement of external agencies as well as details of resolutions. The school site is secure and procedures for signing in visitors to the school are robust.

### **Inspection findings**

- I looked at how well leaders and governors are improving pupils' outcomes in writing, particularly for children in the early years provision and pupils in key stage 2. This was because writing was identified as a weakness within the early learning goals in the early years and pupils' progress in writing was well below average at the end of key stage 2 in 2018.
- There has clearly been a greater focus on writing in the school over the past

year. From the early years upwards, classrooms are adorned with displays and good examples of writing on the walls and on your 'clothes lines'. Your chosen approach towards improving the quality of writing is reaping rewards. Pupils in key stage 2 have a good understanding of subject-specific terms. Many could explain to me the meaning of 'alliteration', 'personification' and 'onomatopoeia', and proudly attempted to use these techniques in their written work, ticking off these items on their assessment sheets as they wrote.

- Children in the early years were observed diligently writing individual words to form sentences, while those that needed to, drew upon their phonics skills. Provisional achievement information for 2019 shows improvements in both attainment and progress in writing across the school. However, improvements in writing rightly remain a whole-school priority for the coming academic year.
- I also investigated how well leaders and governors spend the pupil premium funding to diminish the differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils in the school and others nationally. In addition, the school receives the service pupil premium for pupils whose parents serve in the forces. Historically, pupils in receipt of pupil premium in the school have not achieved as well as others. This was particularly the case in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2018.
- Governors routinely challenge you on how you spend the pupil premium and question leaders about its impact on improving outcomes. You use the pupil premium fund for a range of supportive activities including additional intervention sessions and for partially funding literacy and numeracy programmes of study. Provisional achievement data for 2019 shows improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in reading and writing. However, these improvements are not yet marked enough and leaders and governors have identified the need to maintain the pupil premium expenditure as a key focus.
- The service pupil premium has been used particularly well in relation to the pastoral support offered to children of service families. You have just successfully piloted, at the request of parents, a 'Military Little Troopers' club which catered for all ages and involved a range of motivating activities including clay sculpture and cooking. This club will run from September 2019. Your spending of the service pupil premium has been positively acknowledged by the Ministry of Defence, and Winchester University are using the school as a case study in their research.
- I looked at how well the needs of the most able pupils are met in the school. This was because in 2018, no pupils achieved at the higher standard in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 and this also led to no pupils achieving the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined. Your improvement plan rightly identified the need to increase the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard or working at greater depth.
- Teachers have raised their expectations and this was evident from the books I reviewed in the early years and in key stage 2. Teachers routinely plan activities which stretch and challenge children and pupils, and most pupils rise to the challenges presented to them. Provisional data for key stage 2 in 2019 shows that a proportion of pupils are now achieving the higher standard in writing and hence in the combined measure of reading, writing and mathematics.

- Finally, I looked at the impact of your actions to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school, as the most recently published data showed that this figure was too high.
- You target these pupils and their parents with support from the school attendance officer as well as the inclusion officer. While pupils' overall attendance is broadly average, vulnerable pupils attend school less regularly. Although persistent absence has fallen slightly, it is still too high.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- maintain the focus on writing across the school to build on the successes achieved this year
- continue to use the pupil premium funding to further diminish the differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils in the school and others nationally
- reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school and raise the attendance of pupils who belong to vulnerable groups.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and other senior leaders, the chair and two other members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Together we visited a number of classes focusing mainly on lessons in key stage 2 and in the early years to look at the quality of pupils' and children's writing as well as evaluating how well teachers are meeting the needs of the most able pupils and children. We looked at samples of work in lessons. I looked at a range of documentation including information on attendance and behaviour; your curriculum structure; achievement information; and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I also checked the school's records of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff.

I considered the responses of 73 parents to Parent View, including 38 free-text responses, as well as 20 responses to the staff survey and 58 responses to the pupil survey.