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Mrs Jayne Grundy
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Dear Mrs Grundy

Short inspection of St Michael's CofE (A) First School

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 2016, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, the staff and governors successfully promote the school's aims of creating an environment where pupils are safe and happy and where pupils enjoy learning. 'I believe that my child is being nurtured and educated in a manner which is shaping him into a well-rounded and independent individual' and 'the school has a very caring ethos and staff are always happy to address any question or concern you might have' were just a few of the typical views expressed by parents.

Since the previous inspection in 2011, the school has had considerable changes in staffing. Some classes in the school have had numerous changes in class teachers. At the time of this inspection, most of the class teachers were not in post at the time of the last inspection.

Following the last inspection, you were asked to make sure that pupils made rapid progress in lessons. You and other senior leaders have provided new and existing staff with appropriate training. This support is having a beneficial impact on pupils' learning. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are making good progress over time and that those affected by the frequent changes in teaching are catching up quickly. During our visits to classes, pupils had a clear understanding of what they were expected to learn by the end of the lesson and how long they had to complete

their task. We also observed teachers using questions well to challenge and move pupils' learning forward.

The actions senior leaders have taken to accelerate pupils' achievement in mathematics have proved successful. Staff plan mathematical activities that encourage pupils to use their previous learning to investigate and solve suitably challenging problems. Pupils in Year 2, for example, were thoroughly enjoying working out the answer to two different number questions and then finding a way to 'prove' that the answers were the same. The pupils were able to demonstrate how they worked out the answers and the methods they used. Similarly, a group of pupils in Year 3 were purchasing 'theatre tickets' and were trying to find a variety of ways to make £1.70 using 17 coins. The pupils persisted until they found the correct combination of coins.

In addition to accelerating pupils' learning, the previous inspection report identified the need to further raise pupils' attainment in key stage 2. Your latest information about pupils' achievement shows that pupils in Years 3 and 4 are reaching higher standards than in the past because of improvements in teaching. However, your information also shows that while gaps between different groups of pupils in the school are closing, boys do not attain as well as girls in Years 1 to 4. Staff are taking appropriate steps in response to this. For example, they ensure that the activities they plan interest boys and girls. During the inspection, boys and girls confirmed that their lessons were 'fun' and that they 'enjoyed learning'. You and the staff are continuing to find ways in which you can help boys reach even higher standards.

In September 2015, the governing body took over the management of the on-site nursery. They manage this provision well. The nursery continues to cater for children aged 3 to 4 and parents still have to make a separate application if they want their children to attend the Reception class in the main school. In September, governors appointed a nursery manager and they also asked the teacher of the Reception class to oversee improvements in the nursery. This teacher has successfully helped the nursery manager to establish appropriate systems for recording the achievements of the children and to reorganise the classroom and outdoor learning areas. The Reception teacher is proposing to share effective practice with the nursery staff so that they can continue to refine the activities they plan for children of different abilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for keeping pupils safe are effective. You and the staff take appropriate and prompt action in response to concerns about individual pupils. The governing body keeps a close check on school policies and ensure that they meet the latest statutory requirements for keeping pupils safe. A member of the governing body regularly joins you on a walk around the school site to make sure it is safe for pupils.

The school's office service manager ensures that relevant information is obtained and checked before new staff are appointed. She keeps a record of the training undertaken by staff and governors and sends out timely reminders when their training is due for renewal.

The pupils and parents I spoke with during the inspection described the school as a safe place. Through lessons and assemblies, staff provide pupils with good opportunities to learn how to keep safe. Pupils spoke confidently about the importance of crossing the roads and quiet lanes in the village with care and keeping personal information secure when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- You have high expectations of staff and are continually seeking ways of helping teachers meet the learning and developmental needs of pupils. You make sure that staff receive the support and training they need to improve. You and the governors also take appropriate and firm action in response to weaknesses in teaching. This approach of support and challenge has helped to ensure that pupils make good progress by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 4.
- St Michael's is part of a collaboration with 10 other local schools. This arrangement gives you the chance to work alongside other headteachers and check the effectiveness of teaching on pupils' learning in other schools. Teachers benefit from the opportunity to train with staff in the collaboration, while pupils have the chance to extend their experiences by participating in dance festivals and sporting events.
- When children join the Reception class, staff make sure that children settle quickly and make strong gains in their learning. In 2015, the proportion of girls achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception was well above the national figure. In comparison, it was similar to the national figure for boys. Your latest information shows that the boys and girls currently in the Reception class are achieving equally well. This is because staff in the Reception class make sure that the activities they plan motivate and challenge all children.
- In Years 1 to 4, teachers plan activities which enable pupils to become confident writers and fluent readers. Pupils have regular opportunities to write and reflect on different perspectives. In Year 4, for example, pupils learned about the Second World War and wrote sensitively about children who were evacuated. The pupils made sure that they used punctuation and grammar accurately and that they used their knowledge of phonics to spell correctly.
- Senior leaders and teachers meet frequently to identify the additional support that individual pupils need to meet their learning targets. They focus

particularly on those who have special educational needs or disability and pupils at risk of falling behind. However, once the support for pupils begins, senior leaders do not check quickly enough if it is making enough of a difference to pupils' learning. Consequently, there are occasions when a few pupils do not make as much progress as they should during these extra support sessions.

- Staff plan activities that help to bring learning to life. Pupils in Year 3, for instance, spoke enthusiastically about their work on the Romans. They told me that they had the opportunity to visit and explore a Roman site and to become a gladiator. Following this visit, pupils wrote about their experience. They described life in Roman times perfectly, including the correct terminology.
- Through the curriculum, staff help pupils to gain a secure understanding of other cultures. For instance, St Michael's has established a partnership with a school in Kenya. This link gives pupils the chance to learn about life in a different country and to learn about Kenyan culture.
- Pupils behave well. They are polite and considerate during classroom discussions and they make sure that they take it in turns to speak. In the playground, they enjoy using the wide range of equipment. During the inspection, they were particularly positive about the games area, which includes building bricks so that they can design and make models. Your records show that incidents of poor behaviour are low. You are working well with a range of agencies to provide support for the small number of pupils who need help with improving their behaviour. This support is proving to be beneficial for the individuals concerned.
- A new chair of the governing body was elected in September 2015. The chair and other members of the governing body speak passionately about the school, pupils and staff. They make sure that they keep themselves up to date with what is expected of them by regularly attending training. Roles and responsibilities have been carefully allocated so that each governor can keep a watchful eye on specific aspects of the work of the school. Senior leaders provide helpful information about the achievement of pupils. This enables governors to ask important questions about pupils' learning in reading, writing and mathematics. The governing body knows how pupil premium funding is spent. Governors also know that, over time, disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as their classmates. However, the governing body does not receive sufficient information about the impact of different actions on disadvantaged pupils. This prevents governors from identifying the most and least effective actions and from making informed contributions to the discussions about future expenditure.

- Effective use of the physical education sports funding gives pupils the chance to participate in a wide range of sporting activities. The clubs include tennis, archery, hockey, dance, table tennis and running. Pupils told me that these activities help to keep them fit.

- The majority of parents I spoke with during the inspection and who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire were positive about the work of the school. They praised the range of information that they receive and the opportunity to speak with you during the fortnightly coffee mornings. Additionally, a parents' forum gives parents the chance to share their views about the school and to suggest changes. A small minority of parents raised a number of concerns relating to their children. School records show that you are in the process of working with individual parents in order to resolve their specific concerns.

- The Parent Teacher Friends Association is a proactive group. Members of this group organise a wide range of events throughout the school. The money they have raised has contributed towards the purchase of reading books and laptops.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching continues to improve so that staff can help boys reach even higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- the impact of additional support for pupils is checked more frequently so that any issues are identified early and prompt action taken
- governors receive the information they need to evaluate the effectiveness of different actions on the learning of disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you and the teachers with responsibility for the early years, mathematics and English. I also met with the chair of the governing body and five other governors. I spoke with pupils throughout the school day and informally with parents as they brought their children to school. I also took account of the 33 responses on Parent View by the end of the inspection. You joined me on brief visits to all classes. We talked to pupils about their learning and reviewed some pupils' mathematics, writing and topic work. I reviewed a range of documentation including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the most recent information about pupils' achievement and documents related to keeping pupils safe.