

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 November 2016

Mr Stephen Hudson
Headteacher
Church of the Ascension CofE Primary School
New Street
Wall Heath
West Midlands
DY6 9AH

Dear Mr Hudson

Short inspection of Church of the Ascension CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2014, you have led the school through considerable change, including several changes in staffing and leadership. With the support of governors, senior leaders and staff, you have tackled weaknesses with determination and the school has continued to improve as a result.

You are relentless in your commitment to provide the best for pupils, both in terms of academic progress and personal development and well-being. All staff support your vision and all members of staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire said they are proud to work at, what they believe to be, a well-led and improving school.

Pupils and parents appreciate the school's many strengths, including your leadership. An overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said they would recommend the school to another parent. One parent summed up the views of many when they wrote, 'We could not be happier with the school and are so pleased that we chose it for our children. The teachers work incredibly hard to make sure that the children are learning but, as importantly, are enjoying learning. The ethos and values of the school are visible in all that the children do. I feel confident that my children will have a fully rounded education and will be better people as a result of going to Church of the Ascension.'

Many parents have chosen to move their children to your school over the past two years. Consequently the school's roll has increased by 10%, through in-year transfers, during that time. I spoke with several such parents and their children during the inspection and all were fulsome in their praise for the school and specifically the support which helped them to settle quickly into a new school.

You and your leadership team are not complacent. You know the school well, including those areas where there is room for improvement. Outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in mathematics have lagged behind other subjects for a few years, especially for the most able pupils. Your reorganisation of teaching and investment in training is beginning to yield success, but there is more to be done in this area.

The progress made by the school's small number of disadvantaged pupils has been patchy over recent years. Careful targeting of the pupil premium is now seeing this picture improve, but there is some way to go before these pupils are making consistently strong progress across all subjects.

The areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection have been dealt with well. Leaders now accurately identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and these pupils receive effective support. Leaders regularly monitor teaching and quickly tackle any weaknesses.

Governors have grown in confidence and expertise since the previous inspection. They know the school well because they receive accurate information from leaders and they visit regularly. They question leaders and hold them to account for the school's performance, focusing well on the impact that actions are having. For example, the recently formed 'school improvement committee' has already scrutinised leaders' actions to raise standards for the most able pupils in mathematics. However, governors have failed to ensure that the school's website contains all of the information that maintained schools are required to publish. The website is very out of date in several respects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that keeping pupils safe and well cared for is everyone's top priority at your school. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose and followed diligently by staff. All staff are regularly trained and consequently they are confident to refer on any concerns about pupils that they have. Safeguarding records are detailed and of high quality.

Almost all parents who responded to Parent View and all members of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire agreed that pupils are safe in school. I spoke with many pupils during the inspection and all told me that they feel safe in school, as did parents with whom I spoke at the start of the day.

Pupils told me that bullying is extremely rare and that they trust the school's adults to deal with any bullying or other problems that might arise. Pupils understand the dangers that can arise when using the internet because they are taught about this in school. For example, several explained to me that you should never respond to an online message from someone whom you do not know.

The designated safeguarding governor regularly visits the school to check on safeguarding procedures. She recently carried out a safeguarding audit with you and reported the findings back to the full governing body. Safeguarding is a standing item at governing body meetings and governors are determined that deficiencies recently identified in Dudley's safeguarding arrangements should not affect pupils' safety or well-being.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors act quickly when assessment information indicates that pupils' progress has slowed. Their plans to tackle weaknesses are clear, effective and successful. Improvement is evident in several areas, including mathematics and phonics teaching and the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Teachers assess pupils' progress in all subjects twice each term. Information from these assessments is used well to identify any pupils who are beginning to fall behind with their work. Teachers then provide these pupils with extra 'intervention' support. However, although teachers do assess the success of interventions, these evaluations do not always tell leaders which strategies have been most successful and which have not.
- Leaders' and teachers' knowledge of, and care for, pupils are strengths of the school. Consequently, pupils who need extra support receive it. Several parents told me how much they appreciated the extra help their children had been given when they needed it.
- Provision in the early years is effective. Children join the school with varying starting points and they make reasonable progress so that the proportion achieving a good level of development is broadly average. The early years setting is well organised and stimulating. Children are independent, confident and articulate. They are well prepared to start Year 1 when they leave Reception Year.
- Pupils' progress in key stage 1 is strong in reading, writing and mathematics. Results in the Year 1 phonics screening check, which have been above average for several years, were disappointing in 2016. Prior to pupils taking the test, leaders had identified weaknesses in phonics teaching and had taken speedy action to improve it, including extra training for staff and revised grouping of pupils. The impact of these changes is now evident and all pupils now receive daily, high-quality phonics teaching, delivered with a high degree of consistency and expertise by teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils who need extra help are taught in smaller groups, and this is proving effective in ensuring that they make good progress.

- Pupils' progress in key stage 2 has varied over recent years. Reading has been consistently strong. Minor weaknesses in writing that appeared in 2015 were quickly addressed and outcomes were strong in 2016, particularly for the most able pupils. Outcomes in mathematics, especially for the most able pupils, have been weaker than in other areas and this trend continued in 2016. Concerted action by leaders, including considerable investment in training to improve teachers' confidence and expertise, is beginning to yield improvement. For example, in one mathematics class, the most able pupils' books showed that they routinely solve problems that require reasoning and understanding rather than simply applying a learned rule. Pupils told me that 'we have to think in maths', 'maths is harder this year' and 'we really enjoy maths'. In another class, I heard pupils discussing strategies to double large numbers. In doing so, they were deepening their understanding of the process rather than simply practising a skill. However, not all mathematics teaching is of the same high standard as the best in the school.
- The school has very few disadvantaged pupils and some year groups have none. The progress of these pupils over recent years has been inconsistent, but with no clear pattern of underachievement. Leaders and teachers know the disadvantaged pupils well, including the particular barriers that might prevent each from succeeding. These include social and emotional needs, weak basic skills and a limited vocabulary. Leaders spend the pupil premium carefully to provide extra help aimed at overcoming these barriers. In common with other interventions, the evaluation of these strategies does not always tell leaders what has been most successful. The school's assessment information indicates that most disadvantaged pupils now make similar progress to their peers, but leaders recognise the need to accelerate their progress if differences between their attainment and that of others are to diminish.
- Attendance is above average and pupils enjoy school. Every pupil whom I spoke with during the inspection confirmed this fact. They believe, correctly, that they are well taught and they enjoy their learning. When I asked pupils about which subjects they enjoy, a wide range of answers were forthcoming, but mathematics stood out as the most popular response.
- Parents recognise and appreciate their children's enjoyment of school. As one parent wrote, 'My son loves going to school and, as a parent, that says it all.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- all mathematics teaching is of the same high quality as the best in the school, so that all pupils make consistently strong progress
- they sharpen their evaluation of interventions, including those targeted at disadvantaged pupils, so that the impact of interventions is maximised
- the school's website meets statutory requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, your senior leadership team and other members of staff who have leadership responsibilities. You and I visited several classes during the day where we observed teaching and learning and we spoke with pupils about their work. I talked with parents at the start of the day and with many pupils in lessons and at lunchtime. I listened to four pupils read and talked to them about reading and the books they enjoy. I met with two governors. I scrutinised several documents including your self-evaluation, intervention plans, minutes of governing body meetings, and safeguarding and child protection records. I considered 99 responses to Parent View and 22 responses from members of staff to the online inspection questionnaire.

At our initial meeting we agreed five focus areas for the inspection. These were:

- standards of achievement in mathematics in key stage 2, especially for the most able pupils
- leaders' use of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils
- phonics teaching in the early years and key stage 1
- the effectiveness of governance in supporting and challenging school leaders
- the school's safeguarding procedures.