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Mr Brian Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jones

Short inspection of St Mary's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 2017, 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 November 2012.

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 ensured that the school is moving forward strongly. Every parent who responded to the online Parent View survey said that they would recommend the school to others. Parents, typically, comment: 'St Mary's is a very special place and I feel really fortunate that my children get to go to such a caring and supportive school.' Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school and explained to me that they liked it because 'everyone works so well together'.

Pupils are friendly, polite and happy to welcome visitors to their school. The extremely high standard of behaviour identified in the previous inspection report has been maintained. Pupils continue to display highly positive attitudes to learning. They settle quickly to work so that no learning time is lost. Pupils listen well both to their teachers and classmates, and express their own views and ideas articulately.

Rates of attendance continue to be well above average and very few pupils regularly miss school. Pupils have a good understanding of British values. For example, they recognise the importance of respecting different religious views and beliefs. They were also able to explain why they were wearing poppies to mark Remembrance Day.

School leaders have identified a key aim of the school's curriculum as being to 'nurture creative thinkers'. This goal is achieved very successfully because the school's curriculum is broad and rich in terms of the learning experiences it provides. Pupils' work shows that they develop subject-specific skills very well in areas such as geography and history. For example, they are able to use Ordnance Survey maps accurately and identify whether pieces of historical evidence are likely to be accurate or not. They display high levels of confidence in using new technology. This was demonstrated by groups of older pupils who were able to program miniature drones to fly around the school hall and take aerial photographs. A good selection of extra-curricular activities, ranging from sports to robotics clubs, provide further enhancements to the curriculum. Positive links have been established with the neighbouring secondary school to broaden the curriculum further.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Leaders' actions are securing ongoing improvements in the effectiveness of teaching. Teachers are providing pupils with an increasing level of challenge in most areas of the curriculum. This is leading to an increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards by the time they leave Year 6, especially in mathematics. You also spotted, and subsequently addressed, a dip in pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check. As a result, outcomes in phonics have risen to be above average.

Leaders, including governors, know the school's strengths and areas for development very well. You recognise that there is still more to be achieved. In particular, you acknowledge that there is scope for further improvement in the outcomes achieved by pupils. Attainment is above average at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the progress in writing, in particular, would be improved further if more of the most able pupils reached the higher level. Similarly, the good progress that is now being made by pupils in the early years and key stage 1 could be accelerated even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of a high quality. There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. All staff are aware of the need to be vigilant as they know that 'safeguarding issues can happen anywhere'. They have a secure understanding of what to do if they are worried about a pupil's welfare. Leaders ensure that any concerns are followed up diligently. Staff and governors receive regular, effective training about current good practice in safeguarding. Leaders also ensure that appropriate checks are made on staff, governors and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and parents overwhelmingly agree. Pupils are able to talk confidently about the ways in which they are kept safe in school. For example, pupils told the inspector they have a special button to press if something on the internet worries them. They also have a good understanding of

different types of bullying. Pupils are confident that incidents of bullying in their school are exceptionally rare.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first was to look at whether pupils make as much progress as they are capable of in key stage 1. This was identified as an area to investigate because attainment in key stage 1 in 2016 and 2017 was typically in line with the national average. This represented something of a decline, particularly in reading.
- Leaders had themselves identified this issue and had taken decisive steps to strengthen the effectiveness of teaching in key stage 1. Inspection evidence, including work in pupils' books and the school's own assessment data, confirmed that teaching in key stage 1 is effective. Teachers have good subject knowledge and promote reading well. As a result, pupils currently in key stage 1 are quickly developing their confidence in using phonics. They use these skills to help them to read with greater accuracy and fluency. The proportion of pupils in key stage 1 working at the level expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics is improving once again.
- The second key line of enquiry looked at how well children achieve in the early years. Staff in the early years ensure that detailed checks are made as children start Nursery to identify their starting points. These show that children begin school with levels of skill and understanding that are largely typical for their age. However, aspects of children's communication and language, physical development and social skills are often less well developed. Effective provision throughout the early years ensures that almost all children make good progress from their starting points. Last year, almost three quarters of children achieved a good level of development by the end of the Reception class. Furthermore, a significant minority exceeded that level in many of the areas of learning.
- The learning environment in the early years, both indoors and outside, is well resourced and welcoming. Children enjoy tackling a wide range of activities, including some led by adults and others that they choose themselves. Staff model the use of language extremely well and use their good questioning skills to check children's understanding. Staff maintain very detailed records of children's learning. However, they do not consistently use these as well as they could to identify the next steps in their learning to accelerate children's progress further.
- My final line of enquiry looked at how well different groups of pupils, particularly boys and most-able pupils, were achieving in writing in key stage 2. Once again, leaders' accurate self-evaluation had also recognised this as an area for improvement. Work in pupils' books, and attractively displayed throughout the school, shows that pupils have plenty of opportunities to write for different purposes. These include reports of school trips, historical accounts and a range of stories and descriptions. This evidence shows that boys are typically making similarly good progress as girls in developing their writing skills. However, there are some inconsistencies. Not all teachers show the same high expectations of the accuracy of pupils' written work. Consequently, basic errors in grammar and spelling are picked up in some classes more rigorously than in others. Some of

the most able pupils have therefore got into the habit of allowing careless mistakes to creep into their written work and this stops them achieving the very highest standards.

- A significant strength at St Mary's is the quality of leadership throughout the school. You, the deputy headteachers and governors all have a strong, shared vision for St Mary's to be recognised as an 'outstanding' school. Your drive and determination have secured significant improvements over the past two years in the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and in many aspects of pupils' achievement. The capacity for further improvement is strong.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff have consistently high expectations of pupils' written work and do not allow careless errors to slow rates of progress in writing, particularly for the most able pupils
- records of children's progress in the early years are used more effectively to plan for the next stages of their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, the two deputy headteachers and four members of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I also met a group of teaching and support staff. I considered 88 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as eight individual letters and emails. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of pupils read. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.