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4 December 2017

Mrs K Pennicotte-Henrie
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pennicotte-Henrie

Short inspection of St Matthew's CE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following a period when a number of staff, including headteachers, have either left or joined the school, your arrival in September 2017 has provided much-needed stability. Staff, governors and parents value your visible and focused leadership, which provides them with reassurance and gives the school renewed momentum with which to improve. This is helping to address recent dips in pupils' performance and to secure parents' confidence in the effectiveness of the school.

Governors were determined to ensure that the new headteacher they appointed understood the school's ethos and needs clearly, even though this meant that the recruitment process took longer than they would have hoped. During the last academic year, they were supported well by the local authority and interim headteachers, who ensured that the school was in a secure position to move forward this year. Since September, you have worked closely with your deputy headteacher to focus quickly and accurately on addressing the school's priorities for ongoing improvement. Staff value the sustainable and considered way you have tackled this, and the effective support and challenge they receive to improve their teaching. There is evidence of the difference that this is making, both in the quality of teaching across the school and the improvements that are beginning to be seen in pupils' progress and attainment.

Pupils at St. Matthew's are confident and happy. They enjoy coming to school, and reflect how much they appreciate the kindness of other pupils and the adults in the school. They conduct themselves well around the school site, and work respectfully and collaboratively in lessons. Pupils recognise and appreciate the Christian values that are a cornerstone of the school community. Those who responded to the pupil questionnaire reflected wholeheartedly how well their school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally. This spirit of inclusion is apparent in the daily life of the school.

Many priorities have changed in the school since the last inspection. As a result, some of the focus areas identified during that inspection remain 'work in progress'. Pupils can now more routinely describe and explain their learning, which they do with confidence. Teachers make effective use of the assessment system to identify accurately what pupils can and cannot do. However, you recognise the further development work that would help you and your deputy headteacher to look more widely at patterns of underachievement across the school. This would enable you to direct extra help even more effectively. You are also working to refine how carefully learning activities in mathematics stretch and challenge pupils to achieve higher and deeper levels of understanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils undoubtedly feel safe at your school. They know how to protect themselves from risk, both in and out of school. Pupils I spoke to were confident that their friends and the adults in school would help them with any worries they may have. The vast majority of pupils and parents feel that unkind behaviour and bullying is rare in your school and that it is typically dealt with well. This is because of the simple systems that are in place for managing behaviour, which pupils understand clearly.

The culture of safeguarding evident in the school is underpinned by effective systems and processes. Leaders adopt a highly vigilant approach towards ensuring that the adults that come into school to work with the children are vetted carefully. Governors review the central record of recruitment checks regularly, to ensure that the school is fulfilling its legal duties in this regard. Visiting adults and staff who are new to the school receive helpful and accessible information that enables them to understand their responsibilities. Staff and governors participate in regular and useful training, which keeps their knowledge about high-profile safeguarding issues, such as child sexual exploitation, current and up to date.

Staff use effective systems to report any concerns they may identify about a child. Leaders keep careful records and take appropriate action where concerns warrant it. They make use of experts and resources beyond the school to help pupils and families who have specific needs. This helps these pupils to feel cared for and to flourish as a result.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, in addition to considering the effectiveness of safeguarding, I focused on: how well leaders ensure that all groups of pupils come to school regularly; how effectively teaching helps pupils in Reception and Year 1 to develop their phonics skills; how lower-ability pupils are supported to make rapid progress; and whether pupils, especially the most able, are making more rapid progress than in the past.
- Leaders promote the importance of good attendance to all pupils and their parents. They emphasise the link between coming to school regularly and achieving well. Attendance figures show how successfully this message is communicated. Overall absence rates are below the national average.
- Where pupils are persistently absent, leaders understand the valid and complex reasons behind this. They work sensitively and appropriately with experts from beyond the school to support families in ensuring that pupils come to school as often as they can. Their work makes a difference, and there are some notable improvements for some pupils who were previously poor attenders.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the phonics check standard by the end of Year 1 was broadly in line with the national average. However, fewer pupils in the school achieved this standard than was the case in previous years. Leaders know the reasons behind this, which are linked to the specific needs of the pupils in that year group. However, they recognise the importance of strengthening opportunities for children to develop their phonics skills during the Reception Year and beyond.
- From when they join the school in the Reception Year, children have a vibrant environment in which to learn and play. Their interactions with adults, together with their learning activities, provide increasing opportunities to learn their letters and sounds. In Year 1, frequent phonics sessions ensure that these skills are taught explicitly, and additional adults provide extra support to those who need it. This is helping pupils whose phonics skills are less well developed by the end of the Reception Year to catch up.
- Leaders recognise that for some pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language or who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, literacy is a barrier to their wider learning. Intensive additional help through small-group work is accelerating progress for this group of pupils. Although their rapid improvement is not always evident from leaders' information about pupils' performance, it is clear in pupils' work. During the inspection, you reflected on how the extra help could be refined further, to have even greater impact.
- Although pupils typically achieve well in mathematics by the end of key stage 1, their progress by the end of key stage 2 has not been as strong in the past. Leaders understand clearly that deepening pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts is key to accelerating this progress, and they have made improving outcomes in mathematics an absolute priority.
- In lessons, pupils engage enthusiastically with mathematics, working cooperatively to think problems through. They are keen to try harder work, which

they grapple with tenaciously. Teachers provide them with opportunities designed to support, challenge and extend learners appropriately. As yet, this is not always directed precisely to build on previous learning as rapidly as it could, especially for the most able pupils.

- Leaders' information about pupils' current attainment and progress shows encouraging signs of improvement in mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving at least in line with expectations for their age is increasing, and pupils typically achieve at least as well in mathematics as they do in reading and writing. Leaders know that there is further work to do to make up for slower progress in the past and to ensure that achievement gaps, for example between boys and girls, close quickly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- increasingly precise planned learning, especially in mathematics, helps pupils to make consistently rapid progress, so that more achieve a higher standard of learning by the end of key stage 2
- they develop the use of performance information to look more widely at patterns in underachievement across the school, so that extra help can be targeted even more carefully and promptly.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I reviewed a wide range of documents, some provided by you and some of which are available on the school website. Together, we visited all classrooms to observe learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation, safeguarding arrangements and pupils' performance information. We also looked together at a small sample of work from pupils in key stage 1. I spoke separately to groups of pupils, staff and governors, as well as a representative of the local authority. I considered questionnaire responses from 29 pupils, 14 staff and 31 parents. I also spoke to parents informally in the playground at the start of the day, and took into account 30 free-text responses to the Parent View online questionnaire and a letter received from a parent.