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Ruth Leach
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Leach

Short inspection of St Blaise C of E Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 2018, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide inspirational and dedicated leadership and, as a result, staff are proud to work at your school. You have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and are very reflective in your approach to understanding how to develop the school further. As one parent commented: 'St Blaise is an amazing school led by a passionate, enthusiastic and great headteacher.' You have created a strong and nurturing ethos, where diversity is celebrated.

Pupils love their small and caring school. They enjoy many aspects of school life, especially going on school trips and carrying out regular science experiments. They say that their teachers are funny and reliable and always willing to support them. Pupils are polite. They are also keen to discuss their learning, which they clearly enjoy. Parents are also complimentary about the school. As one parent wrote: 'St Blaise is a lovely school. They put the children's needs first and really focus on giving them the best education possible.'

The previous inspection highlighted many strengths of the school, including strong early years provision and effective governance, both of which remain assets of St Blaise. Governors understand their statutory duties very well. They regularly consider information about pupils' attainment and progress and, consequently, have a good grasp of how well the school is doing in relation to others nationally. They sensibly reflect on the implications of such small cohort sizes in their analysis of performance information. Governors regularly visit the school to see for themselves

the impact that leaders have on school improvement. They are very strategic in their approach to decision-making. For example, any short-term decisions they make tie into the long-term plans regarding the development of the school into one-form entry in 2020.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that teaching extends the pupils' vocabulary and that middle leaders were involved in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school. You have been very successful here. Leaders were also asked to ensure that teaching challenges the most able pupils. You know that there is still work to be done in this area of school improvement. Since the last inspection, there has been some disruption to staffing, which has led to pupils making uneven progress. Leaders are aware that some pupils have underperformed, and they are focused on making sure that these pupils catch up rapidly. You have identified, particularly, that the progress pupils make in mathematics is too variable across the school.

You have ensured that the school is extremely inclusive. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make strong progress. As a result, a high number of pupils with complex needs join the school. Leaders acknowledge that this, coupled with the very small cohort sizes, can have an adverse effect on published performance information. You remain committed, however, to all pupils being given every opportunity to 'be the very best that they can be'. Your inclusive practice benefits all pupils. Pupils display a strong understanding of equality, and they speak passionately about their teachers, who, they say, 'treat us with respect and love'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding requirements are fit for purpose. Day-to-day routines are secure. Staff are quick to report any concerns they might have about a pupil. Records are detailed and any necessary actions are completed without delay. Staff are relentless in ensuring that the right help is made available to vulnerable pupils and their families. All appropriate recruitment checks are completed before adults are permitted to work with pupils in school. Governors undergo regular safeguarding training and diligently carry out visits to the school to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are secure.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They say that bullying is 'quite rare' and that if it were to happen teachers would sort it out quickly. One pupil said to me, 'If you are feeling sad, there is always someone to talk to.' Pupils have a good understanding of e-safety.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed that we would focus on: how effectively leaders ensure strong progress in mathematics; how well teachers challenge the most able pupils; how well leaders ensure that children make a good start to school in Reception; and the effectiveness of the curriculum.

- In 2017, the progress that pupils made in mathematics by the end of key stage 2 was in line with the national picture. Provisional performance information indicates that this will also be true in 2018 for attainment as well as progress.
- Leaders are very aware that too few pupils met age-related expectations in mathematics by the end of key stage 1 in 2018. The middle leader with responsibility for mathematics has regular opportunities to use his specialist knowledge to train and support staff. As a result, leaders have an accurate picture of where further improvements to the teaching of mathematics need to be made. My classroom visits, together with scrutiny of pupils' work, showed that pupils have a deep understanding of calculation and the number system. Leaders recognise that pupils require more opportunities to improve their reasoning and problem-solving skills to accelerate further their rate of progress.
- Provisional performance information for 2018 indicates that, although pupils achieved well in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2, too few pupils reached the higher standards. We agreed, following visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' books, that teachers do not always challenge the most able pupils well enough. The progress of the most able pupils, and those with potential to attain even higher standards, remains an appropriate focus for the school.
- The children get off to a flying start in Reception and make strong progress from their typically low starting points. Staff provide a wide range of activities that inspire children to engage in learning through play, as well as in a more structured approach. As a result, children are motivated and eager learners. Children have many opportunities to practise their early reading, writing and mathematical skills in a range of engaging learning activities. Relationships are strong, and children get on with each other very well. Strong communication between the early years staff and the on-site pre-school ensures that children experience a very smooth transition to St Blaise.
- The broad and balanced curriculum is thoughtfully designed and a strength of St Blaise. Leaders have successfully implemented an inclusive curriculum which ensures that pupils have access to a wide range of experiences and life skills. Being a good citizen is at the heart of the work of the school, and pupils regularly contribute to parish council meetings. Democracy also plays an important part in the life of pupils at St Blaise. Everyone is a member of the 'pupil parliament'. As a result, every pupil's voice is heard on school improvement matters. For example, pupils wrote the school's food and nutrition policy. The pupil parliament has recently been featured as a successful case study in a publication by the charity Stonewall, celebrating the school's work around equality.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have more opportunities to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics throughout the school, so that pupils make even better progress and attain highly
- teaching consistently challenges pupils, particularly the most able, to reach

higher standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you to discuss the school's effectiveness. Together, we visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning, to talk to pupils and to look at their work. We looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I considered 36 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text comments. I also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires were considered and I had a meeting with a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school.

I met with six governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to representatives from the diocese and the local authority on the telephone. In addition, I met with the middle leader responsible for early years, and held a telephone conversation with the mathematics leader. I heard some pupils read. A wide range of documents was examined, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement planning; attendance information; information about pupils' progress; and various policies. I also examined the school's website.