

22 May 2018

Mrs Tracy Maley
Headteacher
St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Station Road
Child Okeford
Blandford Forum
Dorset
DT11 8EL

Dear Mrs Maley

Short inspection of St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Child Okeford

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 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 May 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 lead the school with positivity and determination, promoting high aspirations for all. The school's vision 'to be the best that we can be' permeates all aspects of school life. You have established an intensely positive atmosphere in school, where staff and governors work well together for the benefit of pupils. Staff morale is high and teamwork is strong. You involve all staff in the school self-evaluation process, so everyone is clear about what the school does well, and what needs to be improved further. Staff understand their role in the school improvement process, and you hold them to account for the work they do. You have made certain that subject leaders produce focused development plans, and you check frequently to evaluate the impact of actions taken. This has ensured that teaching has continued to improve over time. You work effectively in partnership with parents. They value your approachability and the friendly, supportive environment you have created. All of the parents who responded to the online inspection survey would recommend the school. As one parent noted, 'St Nicholas is a well-run school, led by strong and effective professionals.'

Parents are appreciative of the work you and your staff do to recognise pupils' individual strengths. As one parent stated, 'The school is brilliant at encouraging children, and getting them to believe in themselves.' Parents see your focus on valuing pupils as individuals, and promoting their personal as well as academic development, as a significant strength of the school. Parents are confident that their

children are well taught, and that they achieve well as a result. Pupils enjoy their lessons and are keen to improve their work. They behave well and have a positive attitude to learning.

The previous inspection challenged the school to support more-able pupils to achieve a higher standard in writing and mathematics in key stage 1. The standard of pupils' writing has improved markedly. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in Year 2 was above the national average. The accurate assessment of pupils' work and the improved teaching of phonics contribute well to pupils' good progress, including for the more able. You have introduced a new approach to teaching mathematics and pupils' progress is beginning to improve, but not enough pupils are achieving the higher standard.

Phonics teaching in the early years and key stage 1 was a second area identified for improvement. Strong leadership has secured effective teaching and led to a great improvement in pupils' progress and achievement. Typically, the proportion of pupils now meeting the expected standard in phonics in Years 1 and 2 is above the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your governors and all staff have created an open culture where everyone understands that pupils' safety is their responsibility. Regular and thorough auditing procedures ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training for staff is up to date. You ensure that records are meticulously maintained. You make appropriate checks on staff to ensure that they are fit to work with children. You foster respectful, trusting relationships and encourage parents and pupils to share any concerns and act quickly to address any issues that arise. You work effectively with other professionals to ensure pupils' safety. 'Family support days', which you organise, provide parents with access to specific guidance to help them to keep their children safe. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are safe at school.

You have improved pupils' attendance by working in close partnership with parents and pupils. Procedures for managing pupils' behaviour, including those pupils who are the most challenging, are effective. They ensure that pupils learn in a safe and supportive environment. Pupils say they feel safe at school. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when using modern technology. They are confident that they could talk to an adult if they had a concern and would receive help to resolve any issues. Pupils say that the vast majority of pupils behave well, and that any 'minor squabbles' are sorted out quickly. Older pupils are keen to assume responsibilities. They take their role as 'a buddy' for younger pupils seriously. The school's calm and respectful atmosphere promotes pupils' emotional and social development very well.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, I met with you to agree the lines of enquiry we would follow. We began by focusing on the actions that leaders have taken to ensure that pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress in mathematics. We also explored the possibility of more pupils achieving higher standards.
- You have worked closely with the mathematics subject leader to improve the teaching of mathematics. Following significant and wide-ranging research, leaders and other staff agreed to implement a new approach to teaching mathematics. Extensive training has equipped teachers and teaching assistants with the knowledge and skills to assist pupils to achieve well. Staff are clear about what pupils are expected to know and be able to do in each year group. They understand too how to challenge pupils to achieve higher standards.
- You have focused on ensuring that pupils understand mathematical vocabulary. As a result, they are increasingly able to communicate their understanding. For example, teachers now require pupils to explain how they have tackled calculations and give reasons for their choice of approach when solving problems. The effective use of practical resources helps pupils to show their working and provides them with another way of demonstrating their understanding. A sharper focus on recalling number facts quickly is also contributing well to improving the speed and accuracy of pupils' mathematical work.
- The school promotes a culture of 'keep up, not catch up'. Teachers make good use of questioning in lessons to check pupils' understanding, and act swiftly to correct any errors or misconceptions. The information they gain from checking pupils' work in lessons, together with regular more formal assessments, gives teachers a comprehensive picture of pupils' current learning. Pupils receive clear information about what they need to do to improve their work. They have the confidence to tell their teacher when they are having any difficulties, secure in the knowledge that the teacher will help them. This open approach is enabling pupils to make better progress in mathematics than in the past. Standards are beginning to rise through Years 1 to 6. You recognise, however, that pupils' progress is still not sufficiently rapid, and not enough pupils achieve the high standards of which they are capable.
- Finally, we explored why, in key stage 2, boys appear not to achieve as well as girls in writing. By conducting a detailed analysis of how writing is taught, you have been able to identify the approaches that are especially successful in enabling boys to make good progress. A particularly effective element of the approach used is your commitment to exposing pupils to a wide range of texts when reading. This ensures that they experience a variety of writing styles, and writing that is produced for a range of purposes. They develop a good understanding of how to modify their use of vocabulary and sentence construction, to add interest to their written work and so engage the reader. Improved phonics teaching in key stage 1, together with the introduction of a spelling and grammar programme through key stage 2, is helping pupils to write with greater accuracy.

- Throughout key stage 2, teachers make good links to other subjects to provide a relevant context for pupils' written work. For example, as part of the topic 'Invaders and settlers', pupils wrote pieces that put forward an argument for constructing an Anglo-Saxon settlement in a particular location. Teachers also make good use of practical activities and drama to engage pupils successfully in writing. As a result, pupils improve their writing skills and take pride in their written work.
- We looked closely at the assessment information the school has, and compared the progress and achievement of boys and girls who entered key stage 2 at a similar standard. This information confirms that there is minimal difference in the progress and achievement of boys and girls from similar starting points. Boys, from a wide range of starting points, typically make good progress. During the inspection, it became clear that boys who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities often make rapid progress as a result of the individually planned help they receive.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school continues to focus on improving pupils' achievement in mathematics through Years 1 to 6, so more achieve high standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Cogher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and four governors. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. The views of parents were gathered as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day, and through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke to pupils in their lessons and during playtime. Responses to the staff questionnaire were also considered. Together, we visited each of the classes and looked at pupils' work and information about their progress and achievement. I considered a number of school documents, including those relating to safeguarding and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.