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Riana Gouws
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Dear Ms Gouws

Short inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 January 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 2011.

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 made sure that pupils continue to enjoy their time at school and have sustained pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Senior leaders, members of the governing body and staff share your ambition to make teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' outcomes, as good as they can be.

The school's curriculum programmes support pupils' strong achievement in reading and mathematics. Together with subject leaders, you have developed a very effective approach to teaching mathematics. Pupils are motivated and build their understanding of numbers securely. They use their knowledge confidently to complete tasks and solve problems. Pupils are enthusiastic to take part in the mathematics events and competitions that leaders organise. You have made sure that pupils are eager readers. Children in the early years build up their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) swiftly. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check is above the national average. Well-selected books and daily reading sessions, as well as visits to the local library, encourage older pupils' enjoyment of reading, and high achievement. Leaders have made sure that pupils regularly communicate their ideas through interesting written tasks. However, progress in writing is not as strong as in mathematics and reading because teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' spelling, punctuation and handwriting are not as consistently high.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors found there was more for the school to do to make sure that pupils knew whether they were performing well, and how to improve their work further. You have introduced a clearer approach to giving advice and feedback on pupils' work. Pupils told me that teachers often tell them how well they have grasped new learning, as well as suggesting how they might improve further. Pupils enjoy the additional challenges teachers sometimes set them individually in mathematics. Teachers' guidance is better in mathematics than in writing. Feedback is not always as helpful about what is needed to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and handwriting.

Pupils demonstrate the school's core value of 'respect'. They are courteous, well mannered and welcoming. They listen attentively in class and behave sensibly around the school. They treat the school's resources carefully so that the school is tidy, and free from any litter or graffiti. Pupils' social skills and self-confidence are striking. They know the value of working together to explore ideas because teachers make sure they have plenty of opportunities to do so. In lessons, pupils willingly share their thoughts and way of thinking, as well as listening to one another readily to develop their understanding. Relationships are caring and friendly. Pupils aspire to take on responsibilities as house captains or prefects: pupils in Year 6 lead prayers and singing in assemblies, and play leaders are keen to help the younger ones at breaktime.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The school's records show that any concerns are followed up quickly. Leaders have made sure that training is repeated frequently so that staff are well informed and know the school's systems and procedures. Staff are up to date with current safeguarding guidance, including the early identification of concerns relating to radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have made sure that there is a strong, caring ethos at the school. Pupils' consistently high attendance rates reflect their enjoyment of school. You make abundantly clear to the whole school community the importance of attending school very regularly and on time. You have worked hard to harness the support of parents: weekly newsletters compare the attendance and punctuality of each class. Parents frequently attend assemblies where pupils celebrate their successes.
- You and the leadership team check the quality of the school's work and pupils' progress regularly. Leaders use the information to identify where the school needs to do better. You have selected initiatives carefully to improve the curriculum and successfully raised standards in reading and mathematics. Pupils told me how much they enjoy mathematics because teachers make learning fun. Mathematics days are a particular highlight and foster pupils' enthusiasm to learn multiplication tables and number facts. Pupils appreciate the support they receive from one another in class through working together collaboratively.

- You have rightly identified writing as a priority for improvement. Pupils practise writing regularly. They think hard to express their ideas about challenging questions, for example whether children should be given the right to vote. However, pupils' progress in writing is not as brisk as in mathematics and reading because expectations of pupils' spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills are not as consistently demanding.
- Guidance on pupils' work often makes very clear what pupils do well and challenges them to improve further. Feedback on pupils' written work is not always as specific about what pupils should do to improve spelling, punctuation and handwriting.
- A higher proportion of children reach the expected standards at the end of the Reception Year compared with national averages. Home visits by staff, and opportunities for children to visit the school before they start, help them to settle quickly when they join the Reception class. Leaders make sure that planned activities reflect children's interests so that they are eager to learn. For instance, children measured their height using 'dinosaur feet' and then learned to calculate the difference between two numbers by comparing one another's height.
- Parents very much appreciate the weekly 'stay and play' sessions in the Reception class as well as the information they receive, for example about the way phonics and early reading and writing are taught at the school. Well-established routines help make sure that children know what is expected of them and no time is wasted. Children's self-esteem is promoted successfully through opportunities to show and tell the class what they have been learning, or leading class prayers.
- You make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Very clear guidance for pupils emphasises how to keep themselves safe and free from harm in a range of situations, including how to avoid risks online. Pupils say of each other that they are kind to one another. They are confident that staff will help them should any problems occur.
- Pupils' spiritual moral, social and cultural development is particularly strong. You make sure that pupils know the moral value of honesty and the importance of being trustworthy. In assembly, pupils' enthusiasm for singing together is clear. Pupils are keen to contribute to the life of the school: for example, they are proud to take responsibility for sporting competitions as house captains, or to make suggestions to improve the school further as junior governors.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- expectations of pupils' spelling, punctuation and handwriting are consistently high
- pupils receive clear guidance to improve their spelling, punctuation and handwriting.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Southwark and the Director of Children's Services for the London Borough of Lewisham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Madeleine Gerard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, and with a group of middle leaders. I met five governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. I visited classes from Reception to Year 6 to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. I spoke to pupils informally at breaktime and also met a group of Key Stage 2 pupils. I evaluated recent information about pupils' progress. Records about keeping pupils safe and about attendance were evaluated. I spoke informally to parents at the start of the school day and considered the views of 27 parents from Parent View, the online Ofsted survey tool, two letters, and 13 written comments received from parents.