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Mrs Pamela Hartley
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Dear Mrs Hartley

Short inspection of St Mary's CofE Primary School High Crompton

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils continue to achieve well across subjects during their time at the school. They are given many additional opportunities to develop their individual interests and skills, for example, by joining the popular and successful school choir or attending extra activities, such as the information and communication technology club. Badminton, gymnastics and circuit training are just some of the much-liked sports activities from which pupils benefit.

Developing pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare remains a key strength of the school. Pupils show high standards of behaviour in classrooms and around the school. They listen and respond properly to staff. Pupils are keen to learn and participate in school life. Teaching children to be prepared fully for their life in modern Britain is a frequent focus of lessons and assemblies. In Year 4, for example, the teacher very creatively helped pupils to understand democracy. She arranged a mock council debate about whether Shaw market should move location. Pupils considered videos the teacher had prepared that gave the views of local shopkeepers and residents. Pupils then acted in different roles such as chair, proposer and seconder and then engaged in a full debate and decision about this important local issue.

Leaders and governors make sure that the school's Christian ethos remains at the heart of the work of the school. Links with the local church are well established and pupils are given many opportunities to learn about their own faith. For example, pupils have considered thoughtfully what they understand of God. Typical pupil comments include, 'God is a lighthouse because he shows us the way to go in the darkness,' and, 'God is a friend because He is always there'. Pupils also develop much respect for people who have different beliefs from themselves.

At the previous inspection, inspectors recommended that the school raise the achievement of pupils in mathematics. This has been achieved through well-considered staff training, as well as frequent, detailed help for staff to improve their work. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is now consistently strong. Many pupils say that they enjoy mathematics greatly.

Another recommendation at the previous inspection was that the school continue to improve the quality of teaching. Through much greater sharing of staff expertise across classes, as well as close links to other local schools, pupils benefit from successful teaching across subjects. We agreed that further work is now needed to make sure that teaching in the early years is always as strong as in the rest of the school. You recognise also that while pupils' attainment of expected standards in writing in key stages 1 and 2 is above average, not enough of the most able pupils achieve in greater depth.

Through your own reviews of the school, you identified that the work of the governing body should be strengthened. Members of the governing body have responded fully to this challenge. As a result, they have recently achieved external accreditation for the quality of their work. Governors have a detailed knowledge of the school and give thoughtful challenge and support to your work.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are vigilant in checking pupils' safety and discuss any concerns they have with leaders. Leaders keep thorough records of concerns about children's welfare and link carefully with other agencies whenever necessary. Leaders, staff and governors are trained fully to understand safeguarding. National safeguarding guidance is shared and discussed regularly. Thus, staff and governors are well informed about protecting pupils from potential harm, such as from exposure to radicalised views. Arrangements for the care and protection of pupils are kept under close review by leaders, and regular improvements are made to the work of staff. Much thought is given to teaching pupils about how to stay safe, including by hearing from the police or national charities. Messages about safe behaviour by pupils and adults, including about the use of mobile phones, are displayed prominently within the school. Staff and governors make sure that pupils know how to use the internet and social media safely. Pupils say that they feel safe. They know whom they can approach for help if they have any concerns about their own welfare.

Inspection findings

- Pupils achieve well in their mathematics in key stages 1 and 2. Pupils with whom I spoke said how much they enjoy mathematics because it teaches them to think deeply and in different ways. Parents are very positive about how much their children are becoming confident mathematicians. Leaders have transformed the work of the school in this subject. The work of staff is coordinated skilfully by the subject leader for mathematics. She has benefited from extra training as well as insights into the work of other schools. Senior school leaders too have developed their own knowledge of mathematics and of the teaching of the subject. The way staff plan and improve their teaching has been overhauled successfully. Pupils benefit from many opportunities to solve real-life problems and approach complex challenges in many different ways. Staff use well-planned questions within their teaching. Activities are adapted thoughtfully to meet the needs of pupils, who grasp concepts quickly. Pupils are expected to think, experiment and explain their solutions, to help one another to learn. The best teaching of mathematics in the school is skilful and exciting.
- Governors are resolute in their determination to help the school to improve. They review their own work and its impact very carefully and are taking every step they can to develop their work. They have a clear understanding of information about pupils' attainment and progress. They have a realistic and well-informed view about the overall quality of the school and the next steps for improvement. Governors now ask challenging, considered questions of school leaders. This recent step-change in the precision of their work has brought a new strength to the work of the school.
- Pupils' achievement in writing has been strong in previous years. However, national expectations of pupils were raised in 2016. At St Mary's, not enough of the most able pupils achieved beyond expected standards in their writing. Leaders have engaged thoughtfully with external experts and considered in detail how to improve pupils' writing. They have identified specifically that pupils need better teaching about writing stories. The curriculum now gives pupils more opportunities to be inspired through the work of real authors. Links with other schools in order to review and refine staff assessments of pupils' work have been strengthened. Staff reviews of pupils' progress are now much more precise about how well pupils are learning. School information and pupils' work show that the teaching of writing is improving. The biggest improvement is in Year 6, where many more pupils this year are on track to achieve well in their writing. You are not complacent and recognise that it is important to keep the focus on increasing the challenge for the most able pupils in their writing.
- In the early years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development dropped to below the national average in 2016. Over time, there has also been also been a reduction in how many young children reach the national average in their writing and reading skills. The quality of teaching in the early years is not always strong. You have established valuable links with expertise from outside the school and have clear plans in place to improve the work of staff. Nevertheless, it is too soon to assess the impact of these improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning in the early years is consistently strong so that all children achieve well
- the most able pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are given more challenge in their writing so that they learn and achieve in greater depth.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you and I observed teaching and learning jointly across the school, spoke with pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. We discussed your reviews of the school and your plans for improvement. I spoke with some staff to hear about their work and to check their understanding of safeguarding. I met with five members of the governing body, including the chair. I considered information from school surveys of pupils and parents. I spoke to some parents as they brought their children to school. I reviewed 57 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I took account of 17 responses from staff to an Ofsted questionnaire. I met with your linked external adviser. I checked school records about child protection and reviewed checks made by the school on the suitability of adults to work with pupils.