

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



12 January 2017

Mr Peter Barfoot
Headteacher
St Mark's CofE Primary School
Oxenholme Lane
Natland
Kendal
Cumbria
LA9 7QH

Dear Mr Barfoot

Short inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 December 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 September 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 an accurate understanding of the key reasons why the school continues to be successful and why it is a popular choice of parents in the area. Using this knowledge you have continued to build on the strengths seen during the last inspection, maintaining the high standard seen in reading and making sure that pupils continue to be happy and exceptionally well cared for. You know where there is still work to do, based on your accurate and ongoing reviews of the work of the school.

In tackling the weaknesses from the last inspection, you have improved outdoor learning for children in Reception who now have access to this area throughout the day to create opportunities to extend their learning from indoors. Pupils throughout the school love the mathematics games and puzzles that teachers plan for them which have helped to encourage a love of learning mathematics as well as improving engagement and pace in lessons. You have also tackled the recommendation to improve marking and leaders say this is now more helpful for pupils, who routinely act on teachers' advice and improve their work as a result.

Able supported by other leaders, you have successfully created a culture in which staff are willing to introduce new ideas and help each other to improve teaching and learning in the school. Teachers say they feel valued by leaders and willingly 'have a go' at something new to develop their skills further. They have welcomed ideas

which they say work well in other schools, such as your approach to improving writing using cross-curricular themes. Teaching in mathematics is not yet as strong as it could be, but teachers are working hard to further develop their skills in 'teaching for mastery' and are keen to act on advice given by external partners. However, further improvements to writing and mathematics are required to make sure that all pupils find the work suitably challenging, particularly the most able.

Progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is rigorously tracked by the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Teaching assistants work with teachers to plan activities for pupils who have fallen behind, or where there are gaps in their learning. As a result of this effective intervention, pupils with good attendance now make rapid progress. However, those with low attendance make much less progress than other pupils.

Governance continues to be effective because governors are knowledgeable, skilled and regularly update their training. They take a proactive stance in dealing with any concerns, recording clearly the agreed actions in minutes of meetings. Leaders' work with the Kendal Collaborative Partnership (KCP) is effective in providing an accurate, critical, external view of the work of the school which helps leaders to identify priorities for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's priority and, because of this, leaders have successfully created a safeguarding culture in the school in which all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff proudly shared what they had learned from online training modules in preventing extremism and radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, forced marriage, honour violence and female genital mutilation. Staff know the correct actions to take if they have a concern about a pupil and understand the school's whistleblowing policy.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and can explain the difference between bullying and friendship fall-outs. They know that 'several times on purpose' must be reported to another adult. Pupils talked confidently about how teachers do their best to stop pupils using 'unkind words'. Pupils described well the risks to their safety as a result of the building works on the school site. Although builders have nearly finished, pupils know how they could get hurt if they were to attempt to go behind the fenced-off areas. All pupils have a good understanding of how rules help everyone to stay safe. Children in Reception agreed a set of rules for how Rudolf the reindeer should behave in his much-anticipated visit to their classroom.

Inspection findings

- Pupils are happy at school and say their school is 'awesome', 'fun' and 'amazing'. They explained 'you can be yourself' and they show compassion towards others. Leaders have actively promoted this culture through spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning and a focus on Christian values. The current focus on humility is

further helping pupils to understand how to treat others with respect and to celebrate differences.

- Staff are proud to work at this school and are committed to making sure every pupil achieves their potential. New staff are made to feel immediately welcome in the school. The induction programme they receive introduces them to school policies, ensuring consistency in standards and high expectations across school.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, externally validated by colleague headteachers through the KCP and quality assured by the local authority. As a result, you are confident in the good standard of education continuing but know why the school is not yet outstanding.
- Reading continues to be a strength of the school. Pupils at the end of Year 6 in 2016 made rapid progress in their reading from Year 2, attaining a standard which was above the national average. The very small number of disadvantaged pupils made exceptional progress in their reading. A larger proportion of pupils than the national average reached at least the expected score, with almost a third of pupils achieving a high score.
- Pupils who read to the inspector did so with confidence, explaining why they liked particular authors and using their phonics strategies to help them to sound out difficult words. Indications are that standards in reading continue to be strong. Although teaching assistants have not received any formal phonics training, they provide effective support for pupils requiring help with their reading under direction from teachers.
- Your cross-curricular approach to developing writing has only recently been introduced but is already having a positive impact on improving pupils' writing skills. Pupils are extremely proud of their work in their 'topic' books and recognise the improvements they have made in their handwriting, spelling and punctuation.
- You are monitoring carefully this new approach to writing to check that the desired improvements continue. Occasionally, the work given to some pupils is too easy, including for the most able. This is because subject knowledge is not given a high enough priority, such as scientific and mathematical themes, because the focus may have been on handwriting or presentation.
- Pupils make less progress in mathematics than they do in reading and writing. They are confident in reasoning, or explaining their work, because teachers routinely ask them to do this. Occasionally, some of the work set by teachers slows progress because pupils do not have to think hard enough about their work.
- Attendance overall is good because pupils enjoy coming to school – a view confirmed by parents. A few pupils are persistently absent, including some who have medical conditions often requiring hospital admissions. Although these pupils are on the school's register of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, their attendance is not tracked by the SENCo with the same rigour as for their progress. Consequently, these pupils are not set targets to help them to improve their attendance and support given to them to help them to catch up with work missed is not making enough of a difference.
- Parents' views of the school are overwhelmingly positive. They greatly appreciate teachers being 'on-hand' to answer any questions they may have and are confident that teachers will share any concerns with them about their children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers are given further support to help them to develop their skills in teaching mathematics
- pupils' attendance is checked carefully and swift action is taken to help pupils who are persistently absent so that they quickly catch up with work missed.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The key lines of enquiry for this inspection were to find out if safeguarding and governance continue to be effective and to gather evidence on what leaders are doing to improve writing and mathematics in the school, especially for the most able. I also investigated the reasons why attendance appeared to decline in 2016, compared with the above-average attendance seen historically, especially for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Other key lines of enquiry were to find out what leaders had done to tackle the weaknesses seen at the time of the last inspection and find out about the difference this work has made.

During the inspection, I met you and other leaders, your staff, a group of governors including the chair of the governing body and had telephone conversations with a representative from the local authority and the executive officer of the KCP. I considered the views of parents by talking to them when they arrived to collect their children at the end of the day. I also looked at the 42 responses to Ofsted's parent survey which included 30 written comments. I listened to a group of pupils read and you joined me in short visits to all classes to find out about pupils' learning in mathematics. Together with your leader of English, we looked at the improvements made to pupils' writing in their topic books. I met with a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 to gather their views of the school. Checks were carried out on safeguarding documentation and we discussed the effectiveness of strategies to keep children safe, with yourself and the designated safeguarding leader.