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Mrs Beverley Roberts
Headteacher
St Mary's CofE (VC) Primary School
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Dear Mrs Roberts

Short inspection of St Mary's CofE (VC) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been several changes to staffing since the last inspection. Both you and the deputy headteacher were appointed to your roles in January 2017. You make a good team and are ambitious for the school. You identified where the school needed to improve and took effective action. As a result, current pupils in the school are making good progress. You provide clear and consistent direction for the school and have managed staff changes well. You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school development plan accurately identifies the next steps for the school and how these will be achieved. Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate. Governors are well informed and committed to the school. They visit the school regularly and challenge and support you effectively. All staff who responded to the Ofsted survey said that they were proud to be a member of the school.

Leaders have dealt successfully with areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You have raised expectations of handwriting and presentation. The introduction of a new approach to handwriting has been effective. Pupils are forming their letters well and develop a neat handwriting style as they move through the school. There are clear expectations of presentation. Pupils adhere to these and work is well presented. Since the previous inspection, you have made changes to the leadership structure. You have developed the roles of the leaders for mathematics, English and early years effectively. You have ensured that they have undertaken training and received support. As a result, they are bringing about improvements in their areas of responsibility.

You have managed changes to staffing well and ensured that staff have received appropriate training, and that the quality of teaching is maintained. You are aware of a few inconsistencies in teaching and learning and are addressing these. You know that some pupils could be challenged further, and that the successful strategies to improve mathematics and writing need to be embedded.

All parents and carers who spoke to me at the end of the day and the vast majority who commented online were positive about the school. A typical comment from a parent was, 'I can't praise St Mary's enough. My daughter is nurtured with enthusiasm and professionalism. Leaders are visible and accessible. The school is constantly finding new and exciting things for the children to experience.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Well-established systems and processes mean that record keeping is good. Concerns raised are quickly and effectively managed, either by the school or with the support of other professional agencies. Staff are knowledgeable and benefit from relevant training that meets statutory requirements. There are effective systems in place to ensure that the right checks are carried out on people before they start to work in the school.

Pupils speak confidently about how to keep themselves safe. This includes when they are online, and they can explain in detail what they have learned at school to help them do this. The curriculum includes meaningful opportunities for pupils to evaluate risk and make well-informed decisions about how to stay safe. Parents rightly trust the school to take good care of their children and appreciate the work of leaders to support them and their families.

Inspection findings

- You provide clear leadership, well supported by other leaders. You had already identified the key lines of enquiry for this inspection.
- In 2016 and 2017, at the end of key stage 2, the school's progress scores in mathematics were below the national average. The deputy headteacher has worked with staff to make a number of changes to the teaching of mathematics. This has had a positive impact on the quality of the teaching of mathematics. Training has helped to develop teachers' subject knowledge, and a range of new strategies have been implemented by staff. Work in pupils' books, coupled with your assessment information, show that more pupils are working at least at the expected standard for their age. Pupils have regular opportunities for developing skills in problem solving and reasoning. For example, in a Year 6 class, pupils were undertaking data handling and were confident when justifying and explaining their understanding of the concept. You acknowledge that these successful strategies need to be fully embedded to ensure consistency across the school.

- As a result of a drop in pupils' progress in writing, you have placed a strong focus on improving writing across the school. Your subject leader for English has good subject knowledge and is working effectively with other leaders. You have introduced a new approach to the teaching of writing. Teachers develop pupils' writing skills well and have higher expectations of what they can achieve. As a result of the training and new teaching methods, current pupils are making good progress in their writing. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are taught to use different genres and styles of writing, for example diary extracts, fact files, viewpoints and recounts. Pupils are able to identify key features of texts. You have introduced a new approach to handwriting. As a result, pupils use a neat handwriting style and their letters are well formed. You agree that there are a few inconsistencies and continue to work on these areas.
- You recognised that there was a lack of challenge for some pupils, especially the most able. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards for their age at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 was below the national average. Again, you have taken actions to address this. In lessons, pupils are given the opportunity to undertake challenges that deepen their learning. Pupils say that they enjoy the 'mastery approach' in mathematics and the 'go for gold' in writing. Occasionally, pupils start with activities that are too easy, and they are not moved on quickly enough in their learning. You are aware of this and have identified it clearly in your school improvement plan.
- Attendance rates have fluctuated in recent years. However, you gave me reasons for this, and overall attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. You are proactive and thorough in your approaches to monitoring attendance. You have worked closely with families in order to both support and challenge them to improve their children's attendance rates and this has had a positive impact. Pupils are motivated by the class attendance awards.
- The early years is well led. Staff across the pre-school and Reception work well together and have a deep understanding of children's needs. Children are particularly well supported to improve their speech, language and communication skills. For example, children were independently making dough and exploring the properties of the ingredients. Effective questioning by the teacher enabled children to discuss what would happen if they added more water or flour to the mixture. The outdoor area is well developed and provides a rich stimulus for children's learning. For example, children were inspired when playing in the mud kitchen, and they worked collaboratively together, in sharing and taking turns.
- Pupils receive a range of curriculum opportunities that make a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Year 6 pupils spoke with great enthusiasm about a recent residential trip to Germany. They discussed the visit to their link school in Germany and how this gave them the opportunity to improve their speaking skills in German. Pupils were looking forward to a trip to Birmingham's Symphony Hall in the next few days. Pupils enjoy the opportunities for outdoor learning in the stimulating environment, including the forest school. Pupils very much enjoy looking after the school hamster, who is fed from food grown in the Tanzanian Garden.

- The culture of the school is supportive, happy and friendly. Pupils behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. Relationships between staff and children are strong. Pupils are very proud to take on additional responsibilities, such as their roles as peer supporters, members of the school council and eco-committee members. Older pupils discussed their role as anti-bullying ambassadors and the training they had received to undertake the role effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a continued focus on ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching and learning, to sustain the improvements already made
- the most able pupils are fully challenged in lessons
- the successful strategies to support pupils' progress in mathematics and writing are further embedded.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Somers
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the coordinator for English and five members of the governing body. I also had a telephone call with an officer from the local authority. I observed pupils learning in lessons and looked at examples of pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils during lessons and at playtime. I scrutinised documents, including the school's development plan, the school's own evaluation of its performance and records of checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, from 59 parents and carers. I also spoke to parents at the end of the school day. I considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.