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Mrs Martha Braithwaite
Headteacher
St Mark's CofE Primary School
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Dear Mrs Braithwaite

Short inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 June 2019, 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Leaders are ambitious for the school's pupils and have high expectations of what they can achieve. You are committed to improving outcomes for them. You have addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. A strength of the school is the celebration of its diverse community. You promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, along with the school's Christian values.

You have established an effective senior leadership team. Together with the deputy headteacher, you have led improvements in teaching and have further developed the role of middle leaders, providing them with the necessary skills to be effective. You have identified appropriate priorities with clear direction to continue to improve the school. You focus strongly on academic success, as well as ensuring opportunities for pupils to participate in the broad range of activities which enhance the curriculum. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning because they enjoy what they are being taught. They are polite and take a pride in their school. They are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.

The school's learning environment promotes its core values. You work in close partnership with parents because this is a priority for the school. For example, you have organised focused workshops, weekly coffee mornings and fortnightly newsletters. Parents are very supportive of the school. They appreciate that teachers know their children well and keep them safe.

In recent years, pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Year 6 have been above national averages. In 2017 and 2018, the performance of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, was significantly above the national averages in reading and mathematics. Current inspection evidence suggests that pupils continue to make good progress across the school.

Governors are knowledgeable and work in close partnership with the leadership team. They know the school well, are regularly involved in school life and are ambitious for its future. They effectively challenge leaders to ensure that the school continues to improve. There is strong capacity to secure further improvements for the benefit of your school community.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff have a deep understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and are up to date in their training. This includes understanding the 'Prevent' duty. All checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school are in place. Staff and governors have a thorough understanding of safeguarding practice. Leaders are relentless in ensuring that pupils get the support they need.

Leaders have a strong understanding of the specific needs of the community, the challenges facing families and the risks that pupils might face. For example, strong messages are given to pupils on knife crime. Leaders are very aware of the need to engage with all parents, especially those of vulnerable pupils. They work well with them and with external agencies, for example the police and the NSPCC.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. The school ensures that pupils know how to stay safe online. Pupils and parents say that the school is a safe place.

Inspection findings

- I first looked at the actions that leaders are taking to ensure that pupils make good progress across the school in writing. This was because the progress made by pupils by the end of Year 6 in 2018 was below that in reading and mathematics.
- Writing has been a priority for the school, with a focus on the teaching and learning of writing to improve the progress of all pupils. You have introduced a range of new strategies to develop pupils' writing, starting with the introduction of early writing skills to younger children. Reception children engage in a range of activities that focus on speaking and listening and develop into early writing. For example, they generated words to describe the experience of playing with pasta. They then wrote them, using their knowledge of phonics, with a high degree of accuracy. They become 'super writers' as they begin to write simple sentences.
- Teachers in key stages 1 and 2 are increasingly confident in delivering the new literacy curriculum. For example, in Year 5 pupils were challenged to explain their thinking, prior to writing, as they explored the relationships in a text. This

deepened their understanding and helped them improve the quality of their writing. Additionally, 'wonderful writer' displays, writing competitions and 'writer for the week certificates' have raised the profile of writing in the school. For example, pupils in Year 2 have had poems published following a successful competition. You promote quality handwriting through your use of 'pen licences' and 'handwriting heroes'. You have also encouraged parental support, especially in the use of your website.

- Pupils are now making strong progress in writing across the school. Evidence from a sample of books also showed that the quality of presentation of pupils' work across the curriculum is strong. However, the school is aware that further work is needed to embed the recently introduced strategy so that the teaching of writing is fully consistent.
- For the second line of enquiry, I looked at how leaders ensure that the most-able pupils are sufficiently challenged so that they make good progress. This was because, apart from in mathematics, fewer pupils achieved the higher standard at the end of Year 6 in 2018.
- Leaders have sought to raise teachers' expectations and ensure that the most-able pupils are challenged in lessons. For example, professional development has improved the use of questioning so that teachers probe understanding and develop thinking skills. This has also had benefits in raising the quality of teaching for all pupils.
- The school identifies the most-able children early. For example, in the nursery, additional support is provided for early readers. This enables them to use their knowledge of phonics well. In Year 1, most-able pupils receive daily supported reading. Each has the opportunity to read to the teacher, who questions them skilfully to check and extend understanding. Targeted interventions for older pupils include links with local secondary schools which extend their learning in English, mathematics and music. Workshops for most-able pupils enable them to experience the world of business as they are exposed to life in the 'City'. They are also engaged in a computing project with a focus on architecture, engineering and computing. The school has used additional funding to support most-able disadvantaged pupils well. For example, booster classes have supported older pupils in preparation for external assessments. Regular progress meetings enable leaders to target any underachievement.
- Such activities and interventions raise aspirations and challenge most-able pupils to do well. Current assessment information and evidence from pupils' books show strong outcomes at the higher standard. External reports commissioned by the school also show that the needs of most-able pupils are being met.
- Finally, I looked at how the school's curriculum meets the needs of all its pupils. This was because recent initiatives have been introduced and continuing curriculum development is a priority for the school.
- The school's values and Christian ethos underpin the curriculum, with an emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as their becoming reliable, independent and positive citizens. Leaders reviewed research and visited other schools to gain a better understanding of how best to

meet the needs of their pupils. In particular, they wanted to raise the profile of topic work so that expectations for all subjects are as high as for mathematics and English.

- Teachers worked together to update 'curriculum maps' to plan learning into key themes, planned in half-termly units and supported by 'special activities' to develop curiosity and deepen knowledge. For example, leaders created a museum in the hall and pupils acted as curators, learning about the artefacts on display.
- The curriculum is enhanced by specialist teaching in music, with every pupil in key stage 2 learning a musical instrument; and in physical education, with daily physical exercise for pupils taught by a specialist. Pupils also benefit from a wide range of visits and visitors. For example, pupils have visited the Imperial War Museum and listened to a speaker from Billingsgate fish market. Pupils also visit places of worship of people with different faiths, including a mosque and a synagogue. Such activities celebrate the diversity of the community and further develop fundamental British values. Their aspirations for the future have been raised through opportunities to visit business centres, for example.
- The broad and balanced curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage in their education. Evidence from visits to classes, discussions with pupils and the work in their books show that all are enjoying their learning and making good progress. As yet, however, not all subjects are treated in sufficient depth to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. Senior leaders appreciate the need for continued development, and further changes to the curriculum are planned.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the curriculum so that all pupils make good progress in all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Barnes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with you and senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the governing body. I also met with a representative from the local authority and the local diocese.

- I spoke to pupils and visited lessons alongside members of the senior leadership team and scrutinised a range of pupils' work.
- A range of documents was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, and information about pupils' progress and the school's curriculum. I also reviewed the school's single central record, pre-employment checks and safeguarding procedures.
- I scrutinised the school's website.
- I listened to the views of eight parents and considered 33 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 28 responses to the staff survey and 21 responses to the pupil survey.

