

1 May 2018

Mrs Gillie Young
Headteacher
St Peter's School
Cottonmill Lane
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Hertfordshire
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Dear Mrs Young

Short inspection of St Peter's School

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide a clear vision and have high expectations of what you and your staff can achieve. You have built a strong team of leaders who share your commitment to the school community. Staff are proud to work at the school and morale is high. The dedication of all staff is widely recognised among parents and carers and reflected in comments such as 'They really do go the extra mile to support the pupils in every regard.' The nurturing environment addresses the needs of pupils, allowing them to flourish and achieve well at school.

You and your leaders know the school well. You quickly identify weaknesses and take swift action to overcome them. In 2016, the pupils' progress in mathematics was below average at the end of key stage 2. Good use was made of external advice, highlighting misconceptions in teaching. Training was provided and, as a result, improvements were made. Pupils shared examples of work with me, showing how different approaches had helped them to develop a better understanding of ratio, for example. Consequently, in 2017, progress in mathematics was higher than the national average at the end of key stage 2.

At the last inspection, you were asked to develop opportunities for pupils to discuss and express views and opinions. We visited classes together to look at this, and other, issues. We saw clear evidence that you have addressed this recommendation well. In the early years, we found adults questioning children effectively, helping to

develop their communication skills. For example, a group of children tasted different fruits eaten by the hungry caterpillar. One child described the strawberry as being 'juicy and sweet'. Older pupils were also questioned well by their teacher. In a writing lesson, pupils were encouraged to suggest words and phrases that developed the suspense in their stories.

Governors know the school's strengths and areas for development well and provide effective support. They have an excellent range of experience and expertise that is utilised to challenge school leaders. Through different monitoring activities, governors test out how well the school is performing and ask searching questions of leaders. As a result, they maintain a good strategic overview and share your drive to make the school the best that it can be.

Pupils told me they feel safe in school. You have developed this by creating a strong sense of community. Pupils recognise this and consider the school to be a place where you can easily make friends. Pupils behave well in class and speak confidently to visitors about their work and progress. They tell me that there is no bullying in the school. This ethos was put simply by one child who said, 'No-one would want to bully.' Pupils appreciate the range of school clubs and activities that run before, during and after school. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the standard of education your team provides. You have fostered a spirit of openness and cooperation appreciated by parents. Comments on Parent View, Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, typically state, 'St Peter's is a great community school and provides all its children with a solid foundation in education.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You have very clear procedures and systems for helping to keep children safe. Policies are up to date and reviewed regularly. Records are orderly, which helps you keep track of any concerns. You ensure that safer recruitment checks are carried out and governors support you by regularly checking on the culture of safeguarding in the school. Training is thorough, ensuring that staff are knowledgeable and vigilant should any concerns arise.

Pupils are taught to be safe but are aware of who to go to if they have anything that is worrying them. Pupils know about keeping themselves safe online. They are supported by pupils acting as 'e-cadets' who highlight specific issues about the use of the internet and lead assemblies to inform their peers.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on the progress pupils made in writing at key stage 2. In 2017, the progress made by pupils was lower than the national average and below that made in reading and mathematics.
- You had identified that pupils were not attaining the highest standards in writing, especially those who had achieved the expected standards at key stage 1. You introduced a new structure for teaching writing. Your leader is working collaboratively with other teachers, helping to improve their confidence and to

provide pupils with clear next steps of how to improve the creativity of their writing. Pupils are increasingly able to express their ideas because they have a better understanding of the key features included in a piece of written work. As a result, the writing in their English books is developing a clearer creative style.

- When we visited lessons, the use of these approaches was evident and consistently applied to support pupils' writing. Where teachers adhere to the school's policy on responding to pupils' work and correcting errors, your high expectations are maintained. This is not the same in all classes. As a result, presentation of work is inconsistent across year groups and pupils continue to make repeated spelling mistakes. In some lessons, teachers are not readily responding to what pupils already know. The tasks they are given are not sufficiently challenging to help them make quicker progress.
- My second line of enquiry checked the progress boys were making, especially at key stage 2. In 2017, boys' progress was below that of the girls and of other boys nationally. I took the opportunity to talk to boys and looked at their work in books. There is evidence that progress is improving. Boys spoke enthusiastically about their work and were able to demonstrate how they improved their work through editing. They were especially proud of their achievements in writing.
- Leaders recognised boys' underachievement in the past. It is evident that targeted support is helping boys to understand what they have to do to improve. Your leader shared the school's own information that shows boys' progress is improving across key stage 2.
- My third line of enquiry centred upon the strength of leaders at all levels. You have successfully appointed staff to take responsibility for different subject areas. Some leaders are inexperienced and developing their knowledge and understanding. You have provided time for leaders to check the quality of teaching, helping their understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the subject for which they are responsible. They support one another in staff meetings by sharing and reviewing pupils' work in their books. However, not all subject leaders are fully aware of how pupils are applying their basic skills through different subjects. Some of the work seen in pupils' topic books did not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills and demonstrate consistently high expectations in the presentation of their work.
- Finally, I spoke to you about the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their attendance at school. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is very small, but their progress is below that of other non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. Your leader has a detailed knowledge of these pupils and any particular identified barriers to learning. You and your leader link with parents so that, together, you identify key actions. This is raising these pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Well-prepared case studies are checked by the link governor. This ensures that leaders are held to account for how the additional funding is spent. Where specific class intervention is provided, learning ladders are used to identify progress steps that may be otherwise difficult to measure. This shows that pupils are improving their skills through the support provided.
- You closely monitor the attendance of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. Regular contact is made with parents to encourage regular

attendance. You have considered how to use the pupil premium additional funding to help support regular attendance. For these pupils, there is an improvement in their attendance. However, it is recognised that, for some pupils with specific needs, regular attendance is a challenge.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers and all subject leaders have the same high expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in writing, across different classes and subjects
- teachers check pupils' work more carefully in lessons to fine-tune their teaching and provide sufficient challenge for all groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your leadership team to discuss the impact of actions taken since the previous inspection and your priorities for school improvement. I also met the leaders who have responsibility for English and for disadvantaged pupils and three other subject leaders. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with the local authority's school improvement partner. I met with eight boys to discuss their learning and with a further group of 10 pupils from across the school. I visited each key stage with you, where I observed the teaching of writing, spoke to pupils and looked at the work in their books. I also looked at pupils' books from different subjects.

I took account of 117 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including free-text responses. I looked at 39 pupil and 19 staff questionnaires. I reviewed information, including the school's summary evaluation, the pupil premium strategy and records of teaching and learning. I also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe, safeguarding checks and attendance information. I undertook a review of the school's website.