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Mrs Rosalind Owen
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Dear Mrs Owen

Short inspection of St Michael's CofE Primary School

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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You are determined to provide the best for all the pupils and families of St Michael's. Your ambition and high expectations are shared by governors and staff. Parents speak highly of your approach, describing a school at the heart of the community with an inclusive ethos. One parent commented that it 'places great value on each child as an individual both academically and socially, encouraging them to grow and evolve in both these areas to the best of their ability'.

The strengths of the school identified in the previous inspection report have been maintained and the recommendations for improvement achieved. Pupils are enthused and engaged in their learning because teachers match topics to the interests of the pupils. For example, I observed pupils enjoying the Year 3 rainforest work and the Reception Year space topic. Pupils work towards specific targets and make good progress from their different starting points. Those who need extra help, including pupils who have joined the school during the academic year, are supported to catch up. Good use is made of external specialists, especially for pupils who are undergoing difficult personal circumstances. Parents in these situations reported that they 'couldn't hope for more' and were very positive about the way staff 'care for the whole family'.

Pupils enjoy school; one parent described how his daughter 'bounces into school every day'. Pupils rightly show pride in their learning and are keen to discuss it. For

example, at breaktime, a group of Year 3 pupils wanted to show me their science experiment. They carefully explained the steps they were taking to investigate the role of leaves in helping plants grow. They discussed their initial findings accurately, using scientific terminology well. The weekly 'sharing assemblies' successfully develop pupils' self-confidence and ability to clearly explain and discuss their learning. These assemblies also celebrate pupils' achievements and help to create a culture that values hard work and effort.

The wide range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum and you make the most of local opportunities and those further afield, such as with your partner school in France. Pupils also benefit from the vibrant school environment and the inviting library. You have successfully promoted reading around the school and pupils were very keen to tell me about the books they were currently reading. They also enjoy the reading events, such as visits from authors and contributing to the school's library blog.

Governors meet with you and other school leaders to develop their understanding of the school. As a result, they know the school well and use this knowledge effectively to challenge and question leaders. For example, they ensure that additional funding, including that for disadvantaged pupils, is spent effectively. Governors are aware of the need to review and evaluate their work and structure, especially in light of new governors joining.

You and governors make effective use of accurate self-evaluation to lead school improvement. You analyse what is required and make clear plans to address key areas. For example, you have identified the need to improve outcomes in pupils' writing and improve the attendance of groups of pupils. You make good use of high-quality support from the local authority. For example, you are working with your local authority adviser to develop a clear system to more accurately track pupils' progress, especially in writing. You are aware of the need to improve the school's website and ensure that statutory requirements for its content are met. You have a skilled staff and are aware of the need to provide leadership opportunities to further their professional development.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff understand the importance of reporting any concern and know how to take action if they are worried. Site security is good and visitors are properly vetted. You make good use of external agencies to support children and families when needed.

Pupils say that school is a safe place and that they can speak with any adult if they have any worries. A small number of parents raised concerns about poor behaviour, including bullying. However, behaviour logs and conversations held with pupils suggest these concerns are based on historical perceptions. When parents make any concerns known to you or your team, you take prompt and effective action to resolve them.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I looked at how leaders ensure that pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, are supported to attend school regularly. In 2016, the attendance of these groups appeared in the bottom 10% nationally. However, the small numbers of pupils in these groups mean that each pupil represents a high percentage and, therefore, any analysis needs to take into account that the group's attendance figures can fluctuate widely. You have worked closely with the families of these pupils to support and challenge them as required. You have clarified expectations for attendance. For example, you rightly expect pupils to attend school before and after routine medical appointments. Staff swiftly follow school procedures for pupil absence. Your actions are starting to make a difference.
- I also looked at how well pupils in these groups are supported to achieve well. Historically, disadvantaged pupils in the school have performed well, matching or exceeding the progress of other pupils nationally. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are a smaller group and their achievement fluctuates year on year. Evidence of work in the books of current pupils shows that the majority of both groups are making good progress. The special educational needs coordinator carefully tracks the progress of these pupils and plans additional support based on the individual's need. For example, disadvantaged pupils make good use of the 'book rucksacks' full of carefully chosen books to help them make good progress in reading. Good use is made of external specialists such as the speech and language therapist.
- Historically, the school has had above-average outcomes for pupils. However, last year, outcomes in writing dropped below national averages. I examined the actions leaders are taking to reverse this decline and found that pupils are making good progress. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that they are working at age-related expectations and the actions taken by leaders and teachers are effective. Teachers' increased focus on grammatical accuracy and spelling is leading to pupils' work improving in these areas. Teachers give pupils specific guidance to help them improve their writing. Many strategies are being used by different class teachers, with varying levels of effectiveness. School leaders are evaluating the success of each strategy so that they can develop a clear and consistent approach across the school. They are also working with local school partners and the local authority adviser to refine their approach to the assessment of pupils' progress, including writing.
- I also looked at how effectively leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and prepares pupils for their next steps in modern British society. The school promotes equality and fundamental British values successfully, weaving them into its Christian character. Pupils display empathy and contribute sensitively to discussions such as one I observed in Year 6 about the role of clothing in shaping identity. The pupils demonstrated tolerance and respect for each other's cultures and beliefs. They were also confident to share their own ideas and questions. In Reception Year, children were learning about careers and

quickly made the connection that there are no jobs they cannot aspire to because of their gender. In other lessons, such as science with Year 4, pupils showed that they are taught effectively to think and ask questions about the world and their part in it. This was also evident in pupils' topic books across the school. In addition, the rich variety of extra-curricular opportunities helps create a broad and balanced diet that prepares pupils successfully for life in modern British society and their future transition to secondary school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment procedures support teachers to plan more effectively for rapid pupil progress
- the wider leadership is developed to support ongoing school improvement
- governors continue to evaluate their work to build further on their effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other members of school staff and members of the governing body. I also held telephone calls with both your local authority adviser and your diocesan adviser. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited all classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look in their books. I also spoke with pupils at break and during the day, and took account of 25 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 44 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 33 written contributions by parents. I spoke with staff and took account of 12 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's tracking of pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.