

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



3 October 2017

Miss Genevieve Prayag
Headteacher
St Mary's CofE Primary School
Fowler Road
Islington
London
N1 2EP

Dear Miss Prayag

Short inspection of St Mary's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 September 2012.

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 worked well with leaders and teachers to strengthen provision and to drive up standards. Pupils make good progress, particularly through key stage 2. By the end of Year 6, pupils achieve exceptionally well in reading, writing and mathematics. They write confidently and read with good understanding. They are very well prepared academically for their next stage of learning.

In striving for academic excellence, you have also focused on creating an atmosphere that is described as 'giving a heart' to the school. This ensures that pupils not only achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics, but also that they learn to respect and understand each other. They are confident to deal with the challenges they meet in their everyday lives. As one parent said, 'It is a school facing all the challenges of an inner-city school, yet children have the space to get on and have a happy productive day. That is not luck, it is a skill.' The vision you have created, and which the whole school community has implemented, gives pupils an environment where they can learn and be both happy and safe. The good focus on teaching and learning has ensured that pupils through key stage 2 achieve very well and become thoughtful and reflective.

Leaders work very well together to support teachers in planning and teaching a broad and creative curriculum. Leaders scrutinise very carefully the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those needing extra support. Good and well-managed

interventions make sure that low-attaining pupils make rapid progress and catch up with their peers. Although progress is rapid through key stage 2, you recognise that more work is needed to improve the consistency of challenge for pupils through key stage 1, and to ensure that teachers use assessment consistently well to keep a momentum of progress and high achievement.

Leaders recognise the strengths of the school and the areas that need developing further. Under your guidance, they have the motivation and the knowledge of what to do, and confidence in the ability of the team to continue to improve. Governors are very active and supportive of the school. They ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to achieve well and learn the values of care and respect.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are thorough and that records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding records and the checks on staff and visitors are up to date. Staff training is thorough and weekly updates for staff on safeguarding issues are prioritised at staff meetings. Procedures for referring safeguarding concerns are rigorous. Leaders follow concerns swiftly and work well with external agencies to support pupils and their families. Risk assessments are routine for any visits away from the school. Good planning is in place and staff are fully briefed on what to do if a serious incident happens while they are away from the school site.

Pupils are very confident that the school is a safe place and that adults in school have their interests at heart. Pupils know the rules and procedures in place to keep them safe. They are very aware that visitors with certain badges should not be on their own or speaking to pupils without a member of staff accompanying them. They know to report immediately if this happens. Pupils in the playground play well together and are confident that everyone behaves well and that bullying is not something they see. As one pupil said, 'We don't have bullies because we all get on well together. The school is a good place to be.' Many parents refer to the school's family atmosphere. This is at the heart of the school. The relationship between teachers and pupils gives pupils the confidence that they are cared for and safe. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- My first focus for the inspection was to review how well leaders are ensuring that pupils in the early years and through key stage 1 are making good progress in writing. In 2016, although achievement in writing was very high at the end of Year 6, it was below average for most-able pupils at the end of Year 2.
- Senior leaders implemented a good range of actions in Year 2 following the 2016 assessments. They carefully identified a group of most-able writers in Year 2 and worked closely with this group throughout the year to boost their confidence and skills to write in depth, and to improve the quality of their work. Good interventions were implemented with this group. In 2017, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 showed improvement on previous years, and with a

significant increase in the proportion of pupils writing at greater depth. The level of challenge and support provided for pupils through key stage 1, however, has not ensured consistency in the progress pupils make in writing. Pupils' work in literacy lessons through Years 1 and 2 over the last year shows inconsistent progress overall. By the end of the early years, some children are already confident and beginning to write independently. However, at key stage 1, some of the most able writers are capable of achieving more and making even better progress. Leaders recognise that more work is needed to improve the use of assessment to increase the consistency of challenge in writing activities through key stage 1.

- Another focus of the inspection was to evaluate leaders' work in ensuring that all pupils make good progress through the early years and continue to make good progress through key stage 1. In 2016, progress made by Year 6 pupils through key stage 2 was very high, based on their achievement at the end of Year 2. However, progress from the end of the early years to the end of Year 2 was average.
- Assessment undertaken when children enter the early years suggests a broad range of ability. Although 2016 assessments indicated that many children started the school below average, teachers' own assessments of children in their first term suggested that they had settled very well and were achieving at levels expected for their age. Observations of children who have started in the early years in September 2017 suggest that many are already able to work together, listen well and use language to talk with each other. Many are showing behaviours that are similar to those expected for their age. Samples of children's work through Reception over the last year shows many children to be making good progress. By the end of the year, they were beginning to write about things they had done and seen. Most recognised numbers and could count on and back. Some children were confidently answering simple calculations with numbers up to and beyond 10 when they moved into Year 1.
- Work planned for pupils in Year 1 does not always build on pupils' prior knowledge. Some repeat activities that they were confidently completing towards the end of the Reception Year. Teaching lacks challenge for those who are already confident and who have done similar work in the past. However, for others, work is sometimes too challenging without the support they need to secure their understanding. Assessment of what pupils already know is not used effectively enough to ensure that good progress made through the early years continues through key stage 1. Those pupils needing additional intervention receive good support and they catch up quickly, for example in phonic skills and knowledge. However, for many, the level of challenge is not pitched correctly in lessons and this affects the progress pupils make. Leaders have introduced sessions whereby pupils have two mathematics lessons on some days and two literacy lessons on others. Leaders have identified that for some pupils this lack of variety affects their concentration and they struggle to maintain attention and motivation.
- A further focus for the inspection was to review what impact leaders have made on reducing persistent absence among pupils, and raising attendance in line with the national average. Absence among particular groups of pupils including those

who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are disadvantaged, has been above average over several years. Overall attendance has not improved in recent years.

- Leaders have a range of strategies in place to promote good attendance, such as weekly mascot awards. Leaders have created a good series of rewards for pupils who attend well. Persistent absence is from a very small group of pupils and families who are well known to the school. Leaders make very good use of external family and educational welfare support. They work with these families to encourage and support them in getting their children to school on time. Although attendance is not improving significantly, the number of pupils who are persistently absent are well supported.
- The final focus for the inspection was to review how leaders have ensured that pupils develop a depth of knowledge and understanding across all subjects so that they achieve well and make good progress. Pupils achieve very well in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. Although the school talks about the 'creative curriculum', limited information is provided for parents on how teachers ensure that pupils make good progress across all subjects of the curriculum.
- The curriculum is planned well across the school to ensure that pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum while at the same time developing their literacy and numeracy skills. The 'creative curriculum' takes a series of themes and topics that capture pupils' interest and imagination. Themes are well planned to make sure that, over time, pupils build on their skills in the subject and therefore achieve well – for example, where pupils through key stage 2 are introduced to different periods in history. Pupils are encouraged to investigate and to question and compare. Where younger pupils develop a good knowledge of the topic they study, older pupils are using their knowledge to consider the impact of events in the past on society today. Pupils in Year 5 consider restorative justice and compare crime and punishment in Anglo-Saxon times with the British justice system of today. Year 6 pupils confidently discuss the impact of the Second World War on the role of women in modern society.
- Our visits to lessons and work in books show that effective teaching is ensuring that pupils achieve well across subjects and that they use their increasing knowledge to help develop a deeper understanding. Good links are made to creative subjects with a similar focus on improving skills and knowledge in the subjects themselves. Where this provides pupils with a broad curriculum, it ensures that they achieve well. Teachers ensure that while pupils develop their subject knowledge across subjects, there are many opportunities for pupils to use and apply their reading and writing skills, researching information and writing through different subjects. Leaders provide well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop their reading comprehension skills in a range of subjects and to write for different purposes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- greater consistency is introduced in both the challenge and support provided for pupils through the early years and key stage 1 to improve continuity of progress in writing, particularly for the most able pupils
- assessment is used consistently well to ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged through key stage 1, and that teaching consistently builds on pupils' prior learning to secure good progress and high achievement.

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

Paul Wagstaff
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I had discussions with the senior leaders and governors about actions they have taken to improve the school and to ensure that pupils are safe. Together with senior leaders, I visited all classes across the school. I spoke with pupils and looked at their work. I observed pupils at play and talked to a group about their progress. I also spoke to them on how the school keeps them safe. I analysed a range of school documents linked to the school's self-evaluation and improvement priorities. I met with a group of parents and reviewed the 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also read written responses received from parents during the day. I spoke with representatives of the local authority and the London Diocesan Board of Schools. I reviewed a sample of children's books in the early years. I also looked in detail at the school's assessment information and the results of national assessments in 2017.