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Mr Brendan Mallon
Headteacher
St Michael's Woolmer Green CofE VA Primary School
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Dear Mr Mallon

Short inspection of St Michael's Woolmer Green C of E VA Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2016, 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your clear guidance to staff has led to further improvements in pupils' outcomes, especially in reading and writing. Staff say that they are well supported in this school and teamwork is a key feature, where all play a role in school improvement. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly and used well to inform the performance management of teachers. Your effective use of school self-evaluation to identify priorities for further improvement has rightly identified the need to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics. You have appointed a competent deputy headteacher. She has quickly implemented improvements in the teaching of mathematics that are reflected in good pupil progress.

You work in partnership with the governing body to sustain a shared vision for the school within this local community. Many parents express positive views about the school's caring ethos and say that their child enjoys coming to school. However, about a quarter of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire feel that their concerns about their child's progress and pupil behaviour in school are not always fully considered at a leadership level. This militates against the school's ability to strengthen its partnership with parents even further. The governing body has recognised that this is an area for future improvement.

Inspection evidence confirms that you have sustained a very positive climate for learning throughout the school since the previous inspection. The key British values of respect for others, tolerance and democracy are promoted well across a wide

range of activities and assemblies. For example, all pupils are able to fully participate in the democratic process of electing their representatives on the school council. Older pupils develop a sense of responsibility in looking after younger pupils at playtimes. Pupils persevere with the tasks set for them in class. Handwriting and presentation in their books are very neat. All pupils work well with a partner to solve problems in mathematics. The youngest children play happily together in the Reception class activity areas. Learning is further enhanced through a wide range of themed activities, art, music and sport.

About a quarter of parents who responded to the online questionnaire are concerned that behaviour is not managed well in school. Inspection evidence confirms that behaviour in lessons is good overall. However, scrutiny of your handwritten behaviour records indicates that a small number of boys frequently misbehave at playtimes. Girls say that sometimes other pupils can be unkind to them in the playground, but it is usually happily resolved. These written records are difficult to analyse effectively. Consequently, it is difficult to identify the reasons for this unsatisfactory behaviour. This is an area for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

In partnership with governors you ensure that arrangements for the safety and well-being of all pupils are applied with rigour to meet statutory requirements. Records related to the recruitment and vetting of staff are thorough and fully comply with regulations. Any cause for concern about a pupil is followed up quickly and action taken if required. Regular training in the latest safeguarding requirements and government guidance is given to all staff and governors. This includes training in e-safety and the government's 'Prevent' duty to counter radicalisation. Effective safeguarding is clearly the responsibility of all staff and those supervising pupils at playtime know what to do if a pupil raises a concern with them.

You, and other school leaders with specific responsibility for child protection, work closely with the local authority and other external agencies to ensure the safety of all pupils. Detailed records are kept of any cause for concern, and these are fully monitored by governors with a specific responsibility for safeguarding. The progress and well-being of the most vulnerable pupils are monitored closely to ensure that their needs are fully met.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make good progress in reading. Over a third of pupils are reading above the age-expected level by the end of key stage 2 in the national tests. This good progress starts initially in the early years, with many children attaining a good level of development in their early literacy skills. This is built further on in key stage 1 through the effective teaching of phonics. Performance in the Year 1 phonics screening check for 2016 is above the national average. Inspection evidence confirms that lower-ability pupils in Year 2 are able to use their phonic skills well to read unfamiliar words.
- This good grounding in reading is also mirrored by good progress in writing,

where performance is well above average by the end of Year 6. The most-able pupils in this year group can write at length and with a fluency that conveys a sense of deeper thinking about the characters in their stories. For instance, as part of their work on the second world war, the most-able pupils in Year 6 use descriptive vocabulary to effectively portray what it might have been like being an evacuee. Spelling and punctuation are accurate and pupils write with a pen in a neat cursive style. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their writing skills in other subjects such as science.

- Although attainment at the end of key stage 2 in mathematics is not as high as that in English, progress in mathematics is rapidly improving throughout the school. A greater emphasis on mastering new concepts in mathematics is giving all pupils the confidence to investigate and solve problems. The practical experiences planned for children in Reception, such as dividing up the magic beans between 'Jack' and 'the Giant' provide good opportunities for these children to undertake simple additions and subtractions. These activities are followed through into key stage 1 with more difficult problems using two-digit numbers and simple fractions. Challenging tasks are provided for pupils of all abilities in lessons in key stage 2. The most able pupils in Year 6 say that the activities planned for them make them think hard and as a result they are now more confident in attempting to solve more complex problems, such as the addition of vulgar fractions. However, discussions with these pupils and scrutiny of their books indicate that they have few opportunities to develop their mathematical skills in other subjects, such as science.
- Assessment activity is used effectively to track the progress of individual pupils. The additional government funding, known as pupil premium, is used well to provide support for disadvantaged pupils. Analysis of the assessment information gathered confirms that this support is reducing differences in their achievement compared to other pupils nationally.
- The governing body plays an important role in the monitoring of the school's work. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection. For example, their audit of safeguarding is thorough. Governors undertake frequent visits to the school with a specific focus to measure the impact of the school's improvement planning. They meet regularly with staff with leadership responsibilities. Governors analyse assessment information in depth to ask challenging questions of school leaders about the progress that pupils are making. They take every opportunity to liaise with parents and seek their views about what the school is doing well and how it can be improved. However, they recognise that more can still be done in this area to further strengthen the partnership between the school and its parent community.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are given more opportunity to develop their mathematical skills in other subjects such as science
- incidents related to pupils' behaviour are analysed effectively to improve behaviour at playtimes

- effective lines of communication are established with all parents across the whole school community.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I reviewed a wide range of school documentation, including that on the school's website. I jointly observed the teaching of mathematics skills in all classes with the deputy headteacher. Together we reviewed pupils' ability to calculate and solve mathematical problems in class. I met with the deputy headteacher to discuss the safeguarding of pupils and school improvement. A review of the school's safeguarding arrangements was completed. I also met with a group of Year 6 pupils to talk about their work. A sample of pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 were heard reading. A meeting was held with the leader for the early years. I also met with the chair of the governing body and nine other governors, a school improvement officer from the Diocese of St Albans and a representative from the local authority. I met with a number of parents at the school gate and reviewed 62 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 55 free-text messages. There were 14 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 82 responses on the pupil online questionnaire.

I chose to review five key lines of enquiry during this inspection. This included the school's use of self-evaluation, the use of the additional funding that the school receives for disadvantaged pupils, the teaching and progress in mathematics and writing, the promotion of British values, and safeguarding.

The headteacher was on a period of absence during the inspection.