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27 November 2017

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Dear Mrs Butcher

Short inspection of St Hilary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your skilled deputy headteacher provide strong and purposeful leadership. Leaders at all levels, including governors, share high expectations of what pupils can achieve and carry out their duties effectively. Your determined promotion of the pupils' academic as well as personal development fulfils the school's stated ambition, 'to let no child slip through the net'.

Throughout my visit, pupils behaved extremely well and displayed very positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils responded enthusiastically to teachers' questions and guidance in class and threw themselves wholeheartedly into the stimulating and challenging work provided for them.

My discussions with pupils showed that they are very happy at school. The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agree with the pupils' views and all would recommend the school to others. Reflecting the views of others, one parent wrote, 'St Hilary school encourages health, learning and fun all combined in one to make our children the best they can be. We are honoured for our children to be part of the St Hilary family.' Since the previous inspection, you have successfully strengthened systems for assessing pupils' progress. These include frequent meetings between teachers and teaching

assistants, during which staff scrutinise pupils' work in books, their responses in class and assessment information about their progress. Staff respond well to raised levels of accountability and provide work that is interesting and sufficiently challenging for pupils across the range of ability. Consequently, pupils are inspired to learn, work hard and make rapid progress.

In recent years, you have also developed the way that best practice in teaching is used more consistently across the school to quicken pupils' progress. You have accomplished this by providing more training for staff and increased opportunities for colleagues to work together and share their expertise.

You enable leaders at all levels to play a successful role in promoting school improvement by working closely as a team. As one member of staff wrote, reflecting the views of others, 'We work together effectively so we are all reading from the same page.' This is evident in the accurate identification of priorities for improvement, which include the current focus on raising pupils' mathematical reasoning skills. You recognise that a small number of pupils still lack confidence in tackling mathematical problems and you are continuing to take decisive action to accelerate their progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

All those who work in the school, including governors, ensure that a culture of safeguarding, safety and welfare is paramount.

School leaders and administrative staff complete stringent checks to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that strong action is taken to safeguard pupils. These include checks on staff and visitors to the school, which are of the highest quality. Everyone is left in no doubt and is given clear guidance regarding the school's expectations for keeping pupils safe.

Staff are trained in how to keep pupils safe and they report and record any safeguarding concerns diligently. Staff work effectively with parents and other agencies to support any vulnerable pupils. Parents' views are summed up by one parent, whose written comments include, 'St Hilary School is a very caring community and provides a safe and happy learning environment for our child.'

Pupils said that they feel safe and well cared for. Pupils know how to stay safe and how to care for each other. For example, older pupils treat and support younger pupils with sensitivity and understanding when helping them with their reading.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to check what leaders and teachers have been doing to improve pupils' progress in mathematics across key stage 2. This is because some pupils whose previous attainment was lower than expected have not made the rapid progress needed for them to fully deepen their mathematical understanding.

- In recent years, you and other leaders have placed a greater emphasis on developing pupils' reasoning skills, especially in mathematics. Teachers in all classes have also increased the level of challenge in the work they give pupils. This has brought a steady rise in pupils' levels of attainment, especially in the proportion of pupils reaching higher standards. Teachers are also extending pupils' reasoning skills across the range of subjects, and this, in turn, is boosting their confidence to tackle problems in mathematics. For example, pupils in Year 4 enrich their learning by discussing ideas about what life would be like if Cornwall had not changed since 1850.
- My visits to classrooms showed that pupils across the range of abilities are successfully acquiring new mathematical knowledge and understanding. Pupils' work and written responses to teachers' feedback in their books show improved reasoning skills and deepening understanding. Pupils, including some whose previous attainment has been lower than expected, are also using a variety of skills, such as formal written methods for calculation, more effectively. This is helping them to tackle problems more confidently. You recognise that this work needs to be sustained so that any remaining gaps in pupils' understanding are filled and they do not slow their progress.
- My second line of enquiry was to examine the work of leaders and staff in helping pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make the best possible progress. This is because the range of pupils' differing needs has widened in recent years and has challenged staff to provide more specific support to improve pupils' progress.
- You make good use of additional funding to ensure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities benefit from specialist, high-quality teaching and support. Teachers' high expectations of pupils' effort and work promote their exemplary behaviour and sustain a positive learning atmosphere in all classes. As one pupil said, 'Learning is fun for all of us.'
- Gaps in pupils' social, personal and emotional development have limited progress at times. In recent years, leaders and staff have strengthened the way they support pupils' personal qualities to overcome these areas for improvement and advance their learning. For example, staff liaise more closely with parents and other agencies to support pupils' health as well as learning needs.
- You have provided additional training for teachers and teaching assistants that has increased the quality of their questioning and ability to adapt and respond to pupils' different needs within lessons. These developments have raised pupils' confidence and resilience in learning and have led to all pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, making good progress.
- My next line of enquiry evaluated leaders' actions to improve pupils' phonic knowledge in key stage 1 and, subsequently, their reading skills. This was because there was a reduction in the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in the Year 1 phonic screening check in 2017. Leaders' actions have ensured that there is greater consistency in adapting the quality of phonics teaching so that it is effective in meeting the specific needs of individual pupils.
- Teachers have strengthened their approaches to supporting phonics further by

using a wider range of multi-sensory strategies. This has proved successful in assisting and enthusing those pupils whose specific social and emotional needs restrict their confidence. As a result, pupils' performance in phonics is improving rapidly. This was demonstrated as pupils in Years 1 and 2 read to me. They used their phonic knowledge effectively to pronounce initial letter sounds and to work out and read unfamiliar words.

- Finally, I examined the actions taken by leaders to reduce the persistent absence of a small number of pupils, which adversely affected the rate of attendance in 2016. You have analysed why this occurred, have a good understanding of the underlying causes and have put in place a robust system to monitor and improve pupils' attendance. This has also included 'reaching out' to families in need of support and working more closely with other agencies. As a consequence, you have restored the school's overall above-average rate of attendance, which continues to reflect pupils' enjoyment of school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- sustain the focus on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics, so that all pupils, especially a small number whose attainment was previously low and who still lack confidence, deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the regional schools commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher and with the other staff who have leadership responsibilities. I met with members of the governing body. I visited classrooms with you, and together with the deputy headteacher we scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils during visits to classrooms and observed lunchtime arrangements. In addition, I examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, pupils' progress and the school's self-evaluation and development. I took account of 36 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey and 35 additional parents' written comments. I also took note of 29 responses to the staff questionnaire.