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Mr Bernard Cassidy
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Dear Mr Cassidy

Short inspection of St George's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 2017 with Her Majesty's Inspector Andrew Cook, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, although the journey between the inspections necessitated actions to implement some far-reaching changes at St George's in order to do so. In a relatively short period of time, you have led those changes very effectively, identified the school's key issues and ensured that your staff are fully behind your agenda for improvement. You have been supported well by the school's governors in making these changes, not least by their agreement to a much needed bolstering of management capacity at assistant headteacher level this year.

The school, on both sites, is now characterised by a calm atmosphere for learning in which pupils treat each other and their teachers with respect. Initiatives, like the peer mediators who look out for sad or unhappy pupils on the 'top site' playground, engender a caring ethos in the school. The pupils are proud to tell teachers and visitors how their day is going in terms of their behaviour. This is supported well by the relatively new system put in place to ensure that pupils understand which behaviours help or hinder their learning and that of others. Pupils confirm that behaviour in the school has improved dramatically over the last year; they also agree that this has enabled them to learn more effectively. Playtime activities, provided as a result of the advice given by the pupil play leaders, help to keep the pupils fit and healthy. Residential trips to the Conway Centre for Year 6 pupils are popular and timed near the start of the academic year to promote team building and positive relationships for their last year together before leaving St George's. As

a result, this experience forms an integral and effective part of the school's curriculum. Those pupils who currently find mainstream classes stressful are well cared for and educated in the school's small nurture class; they grow in confidence as a result.

In the last 12 months, leaders realised that, following the previous inspection, the school had not responded well to the rigours of the new national curriculum introduced in September 2014. In particular, the curriculum for mathematics did not prepare pupils well for secondary school and too many lacked the necessary basic knowledge and skills. On joining the school full time earlier this year, you ensured that the mathematics curriculum was reviewed, given greater coherence across and within key stages and that realistic assessments were made of pupils' attainment in the subject. These changes have already started to increase the pupils' understanding and confidence in mathematics, especially for pupils in key stage 1. Those in Years 5 and 6 still have ground to catch up.

While leaders also sensibly carried out a root and branch review of some other subjects, for example science and computing, they have retained the elements that have clearly been beneficial and have demonstrated positive impact on pupils' learning over time. The teaching of systematic synthetic phonics, for example, has provided a solid foundation for virtually all pupils, regardless of background, for good progress in their early reading. That early progress has been reflected in the pupils' good general competency in reading and is seen throughout the school.

Leaders are aware that some parents feel they have not been kept sufficiently up to date with the changes put in place since January. In some respects, this is inevitable because of the pace and scale of those changes. However, communications with parents about the new curriculum in mathematics, the expectations of pupils and parents in supporting better reading and how the new behaviour system is applied have not been fully effective.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school provides a safe, caring environment for the pupils. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. However, beyond that, the pupils are also aware that they need to help to look after themselves and each other. Initiatives, like the 'mini police', have been developed to involve the pupils and have ensured that they know their responsibilities, including who they should ask for help when issues such as bullying arise.

Training for teachers on safeguarding pupils is effective and up to date. This training is available to school staff and governors, which ensures a clear, joint understanding of roles and responsibilities. Work by the school's learning mentors with the families of pupils who have had severe problems with absences has been effective and ensured that attendance has improved and exclusions have reduced.

Inspection findings

- In the last year, the school identified the need to focus on improving the pupils' behaviour and attitudes for learning. Leaders also recognised the need to develop a coherent curriculum, fit for purpose from Nursery through to Year 6, in order to meet the higher expectations in place for the end of key stage 2. You and the governors put in place a strengthened leadership team to ensure that these changes would be embedded over time and, as a result, the capacity of leadership and management has improved significantly.
- The school's focus on 'RESPECT' to develop pupils' resilience, empathy, self-awareness, positivity, excellence, communication and teamwork has paid off. Attendance has improved, exclusions have reduced and the school community, from pupils and teachers to parents, is in agreement that behaviour in classes and around the school is much better than a year ago. As inspectors, we agree that the pupils' behaviour is very good and that their motivation to respond to the new behaviour 'zones' system is high. The pupils can explain what good behaviour looks like and why it is necessary to support good learning.
- The school's decision to review major parts of the curriculum was a sound one. The previous mathematics curriculum was not leading to good enough outcomes for the pupils. Most of the teachers had lost faith in it as a clear, coherent path to help pupils develop essential mathematical knowledge and skills. The revised mathematics curriculum has ensured that from one year to the next, the building blocks are in place for pupils to develop their conceptual understanding. For example, pupils in Year 1 can confidently use their knowledge to explain the combinations of two numbers that add to give 10 and 20, and also explain related facts about subtraction. In Year 2, this has been developed further in the pupils' sound understanding of the relationship between addition and subtraction. However, a legacy of the previous curriculum is that a number of lower-attaining pupils in Years 5 and 6 do not have a firm grasp of their times tables and this is impeding them, especially when trying to carry out long multiplication. The teachers and pupils are working hard to make up such gaps.
- The school's strong showing in the phonics screening check in Year 1 over the last few years provides evidence of the good start pupils make with their early reading. This has continued to provide a firm foundation for the pupils as they progress through the school. However, through effective assessment, leaders identified that some children in key stage 2 lacked sufficient fluency in their reading. As a result, teachers now use 'challenge books' across fiction, non-fiction and poetry to encourage the pupils to read more frequently and to develop greater enthusiasm for reading. This has been coupled with the expectation that teachers will rigorously monitor how frequently pupils take books home as well as a number of other initiatives to promote reading enjoyment, including a reading club for disadvantaged pupils, a 'book bingo' competition and recommended reading lists. The vast majority of pupils in the school are competent readers, regardless of their background. However, there is still some work to do to ensure that more pupils are reading beyond competency and so at a high standard.

- Leaders have also started to review the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics. A good start has been made in reviewing science and computing, and time is given discretely in the timetable to subjects such as music, religious education and design and technology in key stage 2. Previously, these were delivered through 'themes' which, alongside a lack of continuity between the key stages, meant it was difficult for staff to ensure that sufficient focus was being given to subject content. Leaders recognise that the school has more to do in ensuring that the whole curriculum builds coherently from one year to the next in all subjects.
- The school is working hard to provide well for its children who are in the care of a local authority. These children are looked after by a number of local authorities, including Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. The local authorities' personal education plans for the children are of variable quality and this can impede the school's work. The school considers the children looked after as part of the wider group of disadvantaged pupils and currently does not report to governors in sufficient detail on these children's progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- building on the effective work done so far in mathematics and English, a coherent approach to curriculum development is adopted across all subjects, leading to clear progression through those subjects for pupils
- pupils develop understanding and rapid recall of times tables so that their progress is not impeded in broader areas of their mathematical studies
- communications with parents are clear, frequent and effective so that the good work being done, for example on improving pupils' behaviour and promoting the enjoyment of reading, is understood and so even better supported by all parents
- there is a sharper focus on children looked after by challenging local authorities to provide higher quality personal education plans and reporting in more detail to governors on the progress of these children.

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

Yours sincerely

Sean Harford
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors observed teaching across the school and spoke to pupils in lessons in all year groups. We also held formal discussions with pupils from Years 1, 2, 5 and 6. I had lunch with a delightful group of pupils from the nurture group. I discussed their views of the school with a group of parents who generously gave of their time after the school day. We scrutinised pupils' books and other work. We had extensive discussions with the headteacher, senior leadership team and members of the governing body. I analysed the 71 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and the 76 responses to the survey of staff. In coming to our judgements, we also reviewed a range of documentation provided by the school.