

5 April 2019

Mrs A Talbot-Jones
Headteacher
St Denys Primary School
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Southampton
Hampshire
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Dear Mrs Talbot-Jones

Short inspection of St Denys Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2019, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Despite the extra challenge of managing a sizeable building project, you remain firmly focused on the school's core purpose: ensuring that pupils are looked after and achieve of their best. As a result, parents and carers are highly positive about their children's experiences of the school. Some captured the ethos well when they said, 'St Denys is clearly a very caring, close-knit and vibrant school [where] children thrive and are happy and confident to learn.' This is testament to your empowering leadership, supported ably by your deputy headteacher, and to the capable work of your dedicated team of staff.

St Denys is a happy and welcoming place. Pupils' enthusiasm for their school was evident at the start of the day, as they joined in with 'wake up Wednesday' on the playground before heading purposefully to their classrooms. A strong sense of 'family' permeates the school and is valued by pupils and parents. Around the school, warm relationships between pupils and adults are evident. Staff know pupils well, recognising their diversity and different needs. They make careful provision for pupils who need extra help, which enables them to feel safe and to be successful. Adults help pupils who join the school late or for a short period of time, such as while their parents are studying at Southampton University, to settle in quickly and to make good progress. This includes the above-average proportion of pupils who

speaking very little English when they join the school but develop their language quickly because of the useful support they receive.

Since the previous inspection, you have thought carefully about the areas identified for improvement, looking for sustainable ways to move forward, rather than 'quick fixes'. Sensibly, you have looked at practice that has proved effective in other schools, considering whether and how it might support the quality of pupils' experiences at St Denys. You pilot new approaches to check that they have the impact you are looking for before rolling them out across the school. Consequently, some improvements to the school, such as those around developing pupils' accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar, have been put in place gradually and so remain an ongoing focus to ensure their impact over time. In comparison, your work to strengthen pupils' problem-solving and explanations in mathematics is more firmly established. During the inspection, a consistent approach to thinking deeply was evident, both in the lessons we visited and in samples of pupils' books. Over time, this piece of development work has helped to raise pupils' attainment and improve their progress in mathematics by the end of key stage 2.

Pupils learn well at St Denys. The proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of each key stage are at least in line with national averages. A high proportion of pupils meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1, which supports their future learning well. However, progress in reading and writing by the end of key stage 2 declined last year. A whole-school response that focuses on challenging pupils consistently well is having a positive impact. As a result, the proportion of pupils on track to reach a greater depth or higher standard of learning is increasing over time.

Safeguarding is effective.

An ethos of inclusion is evident at St Denys. The school's values, built around a culture of mutual respect, are promoted successfully. Increasingly, parents choose your school because they trust that you will strive to meet their children's specific and diverse needs. Pupils feel safe, are well cared for and accept each other's differences, resulting in a harmonious school where pupils behave respectfully.

Staff and governors carry out their safeguarding duties effectively and diligently. Helpful training empowers them to act swiftly and in pupils' best interests. Leaders have recently improved attendance notably, which has reduced potential risks linked to pupils not being in school. Open and effective working relationships between families and school staff support safeguarding work successfully. Leaders and governors ensure that policies and processes are fit for purpose, keeping careful records of the actions they take when a concern arises. Consequently, risks to pupils' well-being are identified quickly and managed well.

Inspection findings

- In the past, outcomes in spelling, punctuation and grammar at the end of key stage 2 have been below the national average. Leaders' thoughtful approach to developing how spelling, punctuation and grammar are taught is helping to improve how well the learning 'sticks' in pupils' memories. Pupils work confidently together to improve the quality of their writing, using self-editing successfully as a matter of routine. They practise transferring their grammatical knowledge precisely to the wider curriculum. The impact of this recently introduced approach is beginning to show in the accuracy of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar but there is further work to do to secure consistently strong outcomes.
- Reading is promoted across the school, which supports pupils' language acquisition and the quality of their writing. Teachers' renewed focus on encouraging a love of reading is evident through vibrant classroom displays and pupils' enthusiasm. It is reflected in pupils' increasingly creative writing across a range of genres. At times, the accuracy of pupils' spelling and the sophistication of their grammar and punctuation do not match their vibrant choice of language. This risks impeding the good progress that the most able pupils currently make.
- In recent years, the number of fixed-term exclusions has been above the national average. While leaders and governors avoid using exclusion where possible, they have used it appropriately where necessary, as part of ensuring that all pupils in school are safe. Leaders work hard to sustain relationships with families of pupils whose behaviour is challenging, in order to ensure that educational provision meets pupils' needs successfully. As a result of leaders' determined work, fixed-term exclusions have reduced notably, with none this academic year.
- In 2018, the proportions of pupils attaining at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics were broadly in line with the national averages. However, progress across key stage 2 in reading and writing was below average because too few pupils reached the higher standard of learning. Teachers' current focus on ensuring that pupils are challenged to deepen their learning is evident through activities in lessons and additional support that is put in place where needed. As a result, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics has improved this year, with more pupils now working at a higher standard.
- Leaders track pupils' attainment carefully, using accurate and reliable methods of assessment. They successfully use what they learn to identify weaknesses in pupils' attainment, such as the low proportion working at a higher standard by the end of Year 6 last year. Governors are well informed about how pupils are doing, asking useful questions to aid their understanding of what leaders tell them. There is less evidence that governors challenge leaders robustly about pupils' progress from their relative starting points rather than just their attainment.
- The profile of children joining the early years varies notably from year to year. Leaders are alert to this, getting to know children and their specific needs promptly when they arrive. This helps teachers to adapt the curriculum successfully in response, which supports children's good progress. Adults use observations well to direct children's future learning experiences so that

emerging needs are addressed effectively. For example, the focus on the 'wonderful world of maths' engages and enthuses children, preparing them successfully for the deeper thinking required by key stage 1 learners.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent changes to how spelling, punctuation and grammar are taught lead to pupils, especially the most able, making consistently good progress in reading and writing during key stage 2
- governors challenge leaders more precisely about the difference their actions make to pupils' progress from their different starting points so that standards remain high.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together, we visited classrooms across the school to observe learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's current strengths, priorities and work. We scrutinised a sample of pupils' work from across the school. I had discussions with groups of pupils, staff and governors, and with a representative of the local authority. I looked at a range of documents – both on the school website and provided by school leaders – linked to safeguarding and standards in the school. I reviewed safeguarding arrangements, including those around the recruitment and vetting of adults working in the school. I spoke informally to parents on the playground at the start of the day and considered 68 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, including 68 free-text comments. I also took account of survey responses from 18 pupils and 28 members of staff.