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Mr Gregory Doey
Executive Headteacher
Pilgrims' Way Primary School
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Dear Mr Doey

Short inspection of Pilgrims' Way Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since then, you have successfully led the school through the process of federation with a neighbouring school. You have set high expectations for what pupils can achieve. These expectations are based upon your school values, which all pupils are encouraged to learn, for example this month 'determination and self-belief'. One of the strengths of the school is the pupils' attitude to learning. You have created an effective senior leadership team of teachers committed to improving pupils' outcomes. You have further developed your middle leaders, providing them with the necessary skills to be effective. You have set out a clear vision for the school, focused on improving teaching and learning. Together, you have led the improvements in teaching. You have improved the quality of teaching and provision for the most able pupils, in line with the findings of the last inspection report. You have put a strong emphasis on staff well-being and professional development. Survey responses from staff clearly indicate that they appreciate your strong leadership.

You provide clear direction for the school's future improvement. You focus on academic success, yet the opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of additional activities demonstrate that this is a strength, too. You appreciate that you serve a community and have created a learning environment that promotes your core values. Your curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all your pupils, because you are constantly reviewing its effectiveness. You use very well the local resources available to you to provide memorable and rich experiences for your

pupils. This helps to make learning more meaningful to them. Parents are positive about the school.

Children in the early years make good progress, given their starting points and capabilities. They experience a rich language environment, because leaders recognise the importance of communication and language. Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national averages in both key stages. However, pupils' progress in writing has declined in key stage 2 and reading, although improving, is broadly in line with the national averages. Leaders have rightly identified that pupils have made less progress in reading and writing than in mathematics by the end of Year 6. The school's actions to address this formed two of my lines of enquiry for this inspection. Although recently introduced strategies are having a positive impact, you agree that there is still work to do. There has been a significant improvement in attendance, and this is now above the national average. These improvements need to be sustained.

Governors are knowledgeable and work in close partnership with the leadership team. Governors are proactive, regularly involved in school life and ambitious for its future. They challenge leaders effectively to ensure the school continues to improve. Key priorities for development have been accurately identified. There is strong capacity to secure further improvements for the benefit of your school community.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are well maintained. There is a culture in the school that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. You and your safeguarding team ensure that appropriate checks are made on all staff to ensure their suitability to work with children.

The safeguarding team knows individual pupils and families well. They appreciate the needs of the local community and work effectively to meet them. Your team works well with a full range of external agencies to ensure that, when needed, families have swift access to the appropriate support services. Training for staff is regular and kept up to date. Leaders were able to talk in detail about specific safeguarding concerns, for example relating to travelling abroad and possible concerns about female genital mutilation.

Pupils of all ages told inspectors they feel safe and cared for in the school. They all know to whom they can report any worries or concerns. Pupils say they greatly value this support. Information about online safety is provided through workshops and through the school's curriculum.

Inspection findings

- During our initial discussion, we agreed to look at pupils' writing as a key line of enquiry. This was because fewer pupils in Year 2 reached the higher standard

than the national average and no disadvantaged pupil achieved it, and because Year 6 pupils' progress in writing declined for all pupils in 2018.

- Leaders have focused on the teaching and learning of writing to improve the progress of all pupils. You have introduced new strategies to develop pupils' skills in writing in key stage 2. Your new writing scheme is helping pupils develop their stamina in writing extended pieces of work. This is very well supported by the great emphasis you have placed upon the use of high-quality texts. Evidence from learning walks and displays shows that pupils love the texts, which are closely linked to their topic work. In each classroom, displays focus on key vocabulary to support writing. You have ensured that there is high-quality adult support in addition to the teacher in each class. This contributes very well to supporting pupil progress, especially for less-able pupils. The school has rightly invested in training and resources to ensure that pupils have high-quality learning experiences in writing.
- Younger children are introduced to early writing skills. They practise their letter formation with increasing accuracy. Nursery children are involved in a pilot scheme designed to help them write their names more effectively. They are making good progress. Across the school, evidence from books confirms that pupils write for a range of purposes. They use ambitious vocabulary and practise their skills across the curriculum. Their weekly topic for the writing session supports their learning in other subjects, as well as in English. Pupils benefit from using the skills they have learned in drafting and editing their writing. Evidence from books seen confirms that pupils are now making stronger progress by the end of key stage 2. However, the school is aware that, although the quality of writing has improved, it needs to embed the recently introduced scheme of work. This will enable it to address any inconsistencies identified during the inspection.
- The second line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of the teaching of reading. This was because progress in reading at the end of Year 6, although improving in 2018, was broadly in line with national averages.
- There is a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics across the school, supported by staff training. This starts with exposure to sounds and letters for three-year-olds and in the Nursery Year. By the time they leave the Reception Year, many children now have the necessary decoding skills to read simple, age-appropriate words. Most-able children write simple sentences and can read what they have written.
- The picture is similar in key stage 1. Teachers build on the pupils' earlier learning of phonics well. Daily phonics activities match children's level of understanding, learning. In Year 1, for example, some pupils can use their knowledge of letters and sounds well to spell and read increasingly difficult words. They enjoy playing a game which helps them to read 'nonsense' words. Good emphasis is placed on using words in sentences so that pupils can understand their meaning.
- Assessment information is used well to identify any underachievement so that appropriate support can be promptly provided.
- The school has prioritised comprehension skills and learning vocabulary in the

teaching of reading. This is because leaders analysed previous assessment information, and this revealed these as areas for improvement. There is a systematic approach to the teaching of reading, which provides consistency across the school. There is now a culture of reading for pleasure in the school. The recently upgraded library, stimulating reading corners in each classroom and the introduction of quality texts support this culture well. Pupils all say they enjoy reading. They read daily. Home–school reading records are well maintained and parents are encouraged to support their children’s learning.

- Evidence from inspection shows that older pupils have well-developed comprehension skills, including the ability to draw inferences to explain the meaning of some complex passages in their books. They are able to retrieve information from texts and answer increasingly challenging questions. In all cases, the books that pupils read were at an appropriate level and well matched to pupils’ own interests. The majority of pupils heard were fluent readers. However, not all younger pupils are confident in using their knowledge of phonics to pronounce unfamiliar words. Older pupils also are not consistently using this strategy when confronted with words they do not know.
- The final key line of enquiry concerned pupils’ rates of attendance. In recent years, both absence and persistent absence were above the national average. School leaders have made it a priority to tackle these important issues. The school is sensitive to the needs of its community, but equally strong in challenging non-attendance. A number of successful initiatives have been implemented, including a mixture of rewards and sanctions. Pupils’ attendance is monitored on a daily basis and tracked carefully. Attendance records are thorough and maintained to a high standard.
- As a result, attendance has improved significantly so that it is now above the national average. Persistent absenteeism is now below the national averages. Governors are well informed about these issues and are determined to drive forward even greater improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- Further develop the English curriculum so that all pupils continue to make good progress in reading and writing.
- Continue to ensure attendance remains high and persistent absence low.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Barnes

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector held discussions with you and other senior and middle leaders. Meetings were held with a representative from the local authority as well as in a telephone conversation with the co-chair of the governing body. The inspector also spoke with pupils, both in class and around the school. The inspector listened to a wide range of readers from across the school. The inspector visited the provision for children in the Nursery Year. The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in class and as they made their way around the school. The inspector reviewed pupils' work and also observed teaching in a range of classes jointly with senior leaders. A wide range of documentation was evaluated, including case studies, school surveys, the school's self-evaluation and information relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. The inspector considered the responses of 12 parents to Parent View and 22 responses to the staff survey.