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Mrs Sarah Cudmore  
Headteacher  
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St Merryn  
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Cornwall  
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Dear Mrs Cudmore

### **Short inspection of St Merryn School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 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 July 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 have overseen a number of significant changes since the previous inspection, not least that the school has more than doubled in size and an ongoing construction programme to ensure there are adequate teaching and catering facilities. During the last three years, there have been a number of staffing changes and you have recruited new colleagues who bring with them particular skills and expertise that enhance the work of the school.

When the village pre-school closed in 2014, supported by governors you oversaw the development of a Nursery. This was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection and the addition of the Nursery has resulted in children being better prepared for joining the school in Reception.

In September 2016, the school became part of The Learning Academy Trust ('the trust'). This allows you to benefit from, and contribute to, the partnership of 10 primary schools across Cornwall. It also provides staff and governors with useful training and networks where they can share ideas.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to raise pupils' attainment in mathematics. Your team have researched different approaches and the plans that are now in place are resulting in better outcomes than seen in the past.

St Merryn School is a happy school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and learn well. They behave well and are careful to look out for one another. They enjoy the wide range of opportunities that staff organise, especially when they involve food and sport. Pupils are keen to adopt healthy lifestyles and participate in a wide range of sporting events with other primary schools, such as cross-country running.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils and their parents report the school to be a safe place. I agree. Pupils I spoke to and all those who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire commented that they would talk to any member of staff if they had a concern and that it would be swiftly dealt with. A few parents who left comments on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, confirmed this to be their experience. Attendance is good for all pupils and groups of pupils.

Safer recruitment principles are followed when staff members are appointed, to ensure that all adults are suitable to work in school. All staff and governors are trained to an appropriate level. Conferences run by the trust ensure that governors and directors are up to date with their training with respect to safeguarding. You have ensured that welfare requirements in the early years are met. Therefore, the arrangements to keep children safe are fit for purpose and detailed records are kept.

### **Inspection findings**

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about boys' writing, particularly their grammar, punctuation and spelling. Since the previous inspection results in these areas at the end of key stage 2 have been weaker than in reading or mathematics. Pupils, including the boys, are making good progress in their writing. As a result of the focus on writing in recent years, pupils write in a variety of styles, paragraph their work correctly and use direct speech accurately. The heavy investment you have made in improving pupils' spelling over recent years can now be seen in their work. Pupils use dictionaries when they want to use an unfamiliar word or a word they know they routinely spell incorrectly. Home learning is used effectively to improve pupils' spelling further. As a result, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 who are already writing at the standard expected by the end of key stage 2 is higher than in 2016. The number of pupils who are on track to exceed this is increasing. However, in key stage 1, some boys do not achieve as well as girls. This is principally because their punctuation is not as strong.
- The second area I explored focused on the most able pupils and their ability to apply their mathematical skills in all subjects. The new mathematics scheme of learning and teachers' planning is resulting in pupils having a deeper understanding of their mathematics. The most able pupils draw on a range of strategies and can explain their thinking clearly when they are solving problems. They use technical language competently. While pupils apply their mathematical skills in subjects such as geography and science, this is not to the same high standard as seen in their mathematics book. This is because teachers'

expectations of pupils' use of mathematics in the wider curriculum are not as high: some work is incomplete; occasionally errors go unchecked; and sometimes presentation is weaker. Nevertheless, in all year groups, the proportion of pupils on track to reach the expected standard for their age is high and an increasing proportion are working at greater depth. Pupils are enthusiastic about their mathematics.

- My third key line of enquiry looked into the outcomes of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In 2016, outcomes in key stages 1 and 2 for this group of pupils were not as strong as you had hoped. This was due to the particular needs of a small number of pupils. The leader with responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SENCo) has an in-depth understanding of each pupil's needs and their personal circumstances which allows careful planning to accelerate pupils' progress. She is appropriately trained, references the trust's SENCo network across the federation for support and participates in moderation activities. She also draws on a wide range of external agencies and support from within the trust to accurately identify pupils' needs, plan strategies to help them and evaluate their progress. As a result of her leadership and teachers' careful planning, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are increasingly independent and self-assured. In the early years, you have used resources from the trust to run an early intervention programme for speech and language development. Consequently, children are entering Year 1 with better communication skills. Leaders ensure that strong transition arrangements are in place with the local secondary schools to ensure that these pupils make good progress and their needs continue to be met. As a result of this wide range of strategies, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make strong, and often rapid, progress.
- My final line of enquiry was the attainment of the boys in the early years. With the opening of the Nursery, expectations have risen and continue to rise. Staff work well with children and their parents to build children's confidence and develop their skills. Number work is strong and most children can count at a standard appropriate for their age. The boys enjoy measuring and their moving and handling skills are well developed. In Reception, boys show great interest in how things work and can confidently explain how magnets behave. Due to the insistence of the Nursery staff, children hold their pencil correctly and are progressing from mark-making to writing individual letters. However, throughout the early years, boys' writing is less well developed than the girls'.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils improve the accuracy of their use of punctuation, particularly boys in key stage 1
- teachers have the same high expectations in all subjects as they do in English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, you joined me observing learning in classrooms and we looked at a number of pupils' books. I also reviewed the progress of each pupil who has special educational needs and/or disabilities with your SENCo. I spoke with pupils in lessons and while playing at lunchtime. Meetings were held with you, middle leaders, a director of the trust and two members of the local advisory board.

I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation and development plan, assessment information and safeguarding records. I considered the views of 54 parents who responded to Parent View and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires of 16 pupils and 11 members of staff.