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15 March 2016

Mrs J. Moore
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Moore

Short inspection of St James' CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 March 2016, 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

This is a very special school, where everybody 'goes the extra mile' to ensure that children are safe, their families are supported and that day-to-day teaching is of a very high quality. You know each individual child, their needs, desires and abilities really well. The loving environment you have established, based on Christian values and your mission of 'Recognising talents, challenging minds', means that all pupils make good progress. This is the case both in their learning and in their emotional development.

Ambition and nurture permeate every aspect of life and work at St James'. From the moment you enter the school, any visitor would be struck by the level of care and detailed attention that is given by all staff to creating a stimulating and creative learning environment. This reflects the very high standards you expect from everyone, and they rise to this expectation with enthusiasm. This attention to detail is also reflected in the way teachers plan learning and reflect on how well pupils have understood their work. Consequently, progress continues to improve across the school.

You have maintained the strengths from your previous inspection. These included the quality of care and support, pupils' behaviour, the use of assessment and the quality of provision in the early years. You were asked to improve some aspects of the school's performance, such as by increasing the level of challenge for the most able and by increasing the numbers of pupils who exceed age-related expectations by the end of Key Stage 2. While standards are rising across the school, you still have a way to go with this issue. Progress to the end of Key Stage 1 is still not rapid enough to enable pupils to achieve in line with the national average. This means that they struggle to reach the higher levels of attainment by the end of Year 6. However, you have identified this with staff and you are developing strategies, such as mastery in mathematics, which mean that teachers are much better placed to meet the needs of the most able in their classes.

Governors were tasked with improving their role in monitoring and evaluating the school's provision by engaging in a programme of structured visits. Since the last inspection, the governing body has reconstituted and there is a new chair and vice-chair in post. Governors now provide a much greater level of challenge and take robust steps to ensure that policies and school improvement plans are fully checked and evaluated before they sign them off. They act as 'buddies' to key members of staff and key aspects of school improvement. This means they gain first-hand evidence of the work of the school and they use this to keep the full governing body fully informed of progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

You lead the safeguarding team at St James' exceptionally well. This is a school that serves a community of high deprivation, where families and children have multiple needs. Every member of staff is highly alert to any sign that a child is at risk of harm or neglect. Records show a significant caseload of child protection cases and referrals. Leaders, including the school's learning mentor, work extremely effectively to secure appropriate outcomes for these pupils.

Pupils are encouraged each day to show their teacher how they are feeling and classes have circle time together to discuss events and issues that may be a concern to them. Those pupils who spoke to me described how these moments helped them to feel supported by their classmates. At the same time, they know they can speak to an adult alone if they want to share something more privately. This structured start to the day means that adults find out early if any pupil needs quick support from a member of the school team.

Staff are well trained to recognise the signs of abuse. They know the indicators of child sexual exploitation and of radical extremism. You use all the appropriate channels for referring these cases on, which has led to swift and important interventions by other external agencies.

Governors ensure that all statutory safeguarding policies and practices are in place, including the checks on new staff as they are recruited to work at the school.

Inspection findings

- There is a new senior leadership team in place since the last inspection, with the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher from September 2015. You have established a strong, unified team, and have ensured that each member of staff is responsible for leading in their area of work. You have enabled other leaders, such as key stage and subject leaders, to perform their roles more effectively. You have done this by coaching and modelling for them how best to monitor and evaluate standards in their areas. They are increasingly taking responsibility for aspects of this work.
- Provision in the early years remains excellent. Pupils start school with skills that are far below what would be expected for their age. They quickly become inquisitive and responsive learners. This is largely due to the quality of teaching of all the adults in this phase, and the highly stimulating learning environment they have created for pupils to explore. No opportunity is lost to reinforce linking sounds and letters, and number, and to encourage good communication skills. Consequently, children are eager to tell you what they are doing and can sustain their concentration for long periods without the direct supervision of an adult. Despite a dip in standards in 2014, owing to staffing issues, significant improvements were made in 2015 by the new phase leader, and this trend is set to continue.
- In 2015, outcomes by the end of Key Stage 2 were comparable to the national average. This represents good progress, particularly across this key stage, from the pupils' starting points when they entered school. However, few pupils exceeded age-related expectations and this is due, in part, to them not catching up quickly enough in Key Stage 1. You recognise that this is a priority for the next phase in the school's improvement journey.
- The quality of teaching is a significant strength of the school. Teachers are highly conscientious, follow school policies and plan lessons meticulously to ensure that pupils' needs and interests are met. All teachers, in accordance with school policy, follow a similar planning format, which breaks learning into 'steps for success' that pupils understand. This enables pupils to identify what their work needs to show in order to meet the objective of the task they have been set. The information you have on current progress shows that this approach is paying off – with the majority of pupils in almost every class making good, if not better, progress over time.
- Teaching assistants support learning extremely well. Some support individual pupils and are expert at meeting their needs. Others work in groups and lead the learning, assessing and recording progress so that it informs the next stage of the class teachers' planning. These adults have a noticeable positive impact on the progress pupils make.

- There are few gaps in the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils in most classes in the school. Similarly, those pupils who have special educational needs or disability make very good progress owing to the high-quality support they receive.

- As at the last inspection, pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils are excited to greet visitors and are keen to share how much they love their school and value the efforts their teachers make to support and help them. They work hard in their classes, persevering with work, because they genuinely enjoy learning and demonstrating what they can do. The pupil leadership team is directly involved in school improvement; it has influenced the new rewards points system and helped to develop the school's values. Staff and pupils alike say that behaviour is nearly always good, and school records support this.

- Governors and leaders have a clear vision for the future of the school. They have recently established provision for two-year-olds, as they recognise the benefits of getting children into learning as quickly as they can. They recognise the challenges the school and its community face, but are utterly determined to successfully meet them, wanting each pupil to become as ambitious as they are for their futures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that they:

- continue to improve the quality of teaching and targeted support in Key Stage 1 so that pupils make more rapid progress and standards increase to be in line with the national average
- continue to develop the school's focus on the most able in order to ensure that more pupils exceed age-related expectations by the end of each key stage.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Liverpool, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited a number of classes with you to observe learning, including in the early years. I scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and sampled other books, including from mathematics, English and the wider curriculum. I spoke to pupils in class, at break and during lunchtime. I met with senior leaders to discuss the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness and to discuss arrangements for keeping children safe. I met with three governors and a representative of the consortium of which the school is a member. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for me to consider. I took account of the school's own analysis of staff's and pupils' views. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including safeguarding records and curriculum information.