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30 March 2016

Mrs G Zimmerman
Headteacher
St John the Evangelist CE Infant and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Zimmerman

Short inspection of St John the Evangelist CE Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 9 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 January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

This is a very happy, creative and effective school.

You are ambitious for it. Working closely with the deputy headteacher, you have made many positive, purposeful and well-considered improvements, building on previous strengths. You have responded well to the recommendations of the previous inspection. For instance, a useful link now exists with a school in a different location, helping pupils to learn about others. The school is an exciting and stimulating place to be. Pupils are highly independent learners; this is carefully encouraged by staff. Pupils concentrate well from the youngest age in the nursery. They listen carefully to each other and to adults and cooperate very successfully. As they progress through the school, they very effectively use these skills as lessons appropriately evolve, becoming more obviously teacher-directed in Year 1 and more so again in Year 2. Pupils are engrossed in their exciting learning. Their attitudes and behaviour are of a very high standard and they need few reminders from staff.

At the same time, you recognise that there are further improvements to be made. You are working with staff to improve their practice still further. It is not that there is any significant weak practice; simply that existing good work can be honed further to become outstanding and help pupils to do even better. The staff really appreciate this coaching and support. They love working at the school and are highly committed. They are developing their practice usefully. The formal performance management of staff is carried out well. Members of staff highly value it. Where you and the governors have had to take difficult decisions about staffing,

these have been taken fairly and openly and, therefore, have been understood and supported. When there is staffing instability, it is well and imaginatively managed, so that pupils' education continues unharmed.

You and the deputy headteacher have moved your office from upstairs so that it is within the early years classrooms. This is a sign of your closeness to the heart of the school's work: the children and their learning. Parents are very pleased with the school. All who responded would recommend it to others.

We discussed together how the school might strengthen its improvement work further. You know that to be outstanding, the school needs to develop its existing good practice with even more precisely-targeted activity. Currently, although the school evaluates itself accurately, leaders do not pull together and then penetratingly analyse the overall evidence of how well it has done against its improvement targets. This means that improvement work, although it is effective, is not quite as sharply focused or efficient as it could be. In addition, although the school teaches all subjects well, not enough emphasis is always given to subjects other than English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school manages the safeguarding of its pupils thoroughly. The records of this are detailed and up to date and are carefully checked by governors. The school site is suitably secure. Risk assessments are carried out correctly. The school makes proper checks on staff, and other adults, when they are recruited and as needed. All staff are appropriately and regularly trained in child protection procedures and know what to do in different possible eventualities. Pupils are supervised carefully and they are encouraged by staff to take high levels of responsibility. They feel happy, safe and looked after well.

Inspection findings

- Pupils consistently reach high standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You can show clearly that pupils make good progress in these subjects throughout their time in the school.
- Pupils' writing that I saw was of a good standard for each age group. Pupils take care over their work; they form letters neatly and accurately. They choose interesting and relevant vocabulary and are developing their understanding and use of grammar effectively.
- Similarly, the examples of work I sampled in mathematics were of a good standard for the pupils' ages. In lessons I saw, pupils effectively and successfully used and tried out methods of subtraction. They showed good understanding. Staff carefully set work to meet their different needs.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is managed well. The same applies to that for the increasing numbers of pupils who speak English as an additional language. These pupils achieve well alongside their peers.

- Pupils entitled to the support from the pupil premium funding generally achieve well. They do well when compared to all pupils nationally. Unusually, for this school, however, few of these pupils reached the higher levels in English and mathematics in Year 2 in 2015. You reasonably expect improvement this year. The funding is carefully and inventively spent.
- The school teaches phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) effectively, using careful assessments to place pupils in groups working at the right levels of difficulty. This work has been sharpened. Last year, Year 1 pupils reached an average standard in the screening. You reasonably anticipate improvement.
- The pupils who read to me did so accurately and with good expression, enjoyment and comprehension. They were able to self-correct and use their phonic knowledge independently to sound out quite complex words such as 'merchant'. Pupils regularly read their books, which are at a suitable level of difficulty and interest, both at home and in school.
- As we toured the school together, we saw consistently very engaging and effective teaching. The work set by staff was challenging and fitting for the needs of the pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations. They work very well together and are clear about which pupils they are particularly working with and why.
- The early years provision in the Nursery and Reception classes has many strengths. It is well led. Children enjoy making guided choices and engaging in rich learning activities, which meet their needs and interests, indoors and out. Their needs are well assessed, with useful involvement from parents. Children quickly develop independence and benefit from well-focused teaching. They make good progress from their starting points and are well prepared for Year 1. Most reach a good level of development.
- English and mathematics are both well led and managed across the school. Consequently, these two subjects are well taught and have a very high profile.
- The curriculum has many exciting and engaging elements. There is often very useful input from external providers, such as Berkshire Maestros music hub and a parent who helped pupils to build a working bridge. A recent enterprise week was successful.
- Pupils loved to see the new-born chicks, at the time of my visit, including a particularly fluffy one named 'Ofsted'! The potential for learning from this (in science and language, for example) was well exploited.
- Despite these successes, however, subjects other than English and mathematics, although they are all taught, have a relatively low profile. The subject leaders for these other subjects do useful work, but this is not quite close enough to the forefront of the school's life.
- The classrooms are exciting and attractive places for the pupils to learn. The displays in them are mainly focused on English and mathematics, not fully reflecting the breadth of work going on.
- The school's Christian ethos is developed most profitably to pupils' benefit. It provides a very clear and positive set of values which the school works towards. Biblical characters provide relevant role models and their attributes are suitably explored, for example the bravery and commitment of David is highlighted in a

display. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.

- The school develops fundamental British values well, including the rule of law (understood as abiding by sensible rules) and democracy. The school council does useful, high-profile work.
- Pupils are polite, happy and friendly. They behave safely and courteously.
- The governing body is well organised and led. It has effective procedures, which include governors making useful visits to the school to see its work at first hand. Recent changes in the governing body's membership have been well managed, with effective induction processes. Governors support and challenge the school appropriately. Nevertheless, senior governors agree with me that it will be helpful to develop their work in promoting school improvement by asking more precise and targeted questions of senior staff.
- The local authority and the diocese both support the school helpfully.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they make clear and incisive overall evaluations of the actions carried out in the school improvement plan, so that future improvements can be identified and carried out with even greater precision and productivity
- higher profile is given to subjects other than English and mathematics and the work of the leaders of those subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

With you, I visited lessons in all classes in the school. I looked at pupils' work and talked with some pupils. I heard pupils from Year 2 read. I met with you, the deputy headteacher, governors and many members of staff. I also met a representative of the local authority. I took account of the 52 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the responses from members of staff and pupils to their confidential questionnaires. I evaluated documents, including the school's improvement plan and evaluations, information about pupils' progress and minutes of meetings.