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Mrs Julie Cornelius
Headteacher
William Cassidi Church of England Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Cornelius

Short inspection of William Cassidi Church of England Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following the previous inspection, you put in place the changes required to ensure that the school continues to improve. Your priorities are the right ones. Consequently, the foundations required to move the school forward are firmly in place and the capacity for further improvement is clear to see.

Your very strong relationship and partnership with the governing body has been instrumental in bringing about the improvements required. Governors support and challenge you well. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and have ensured that their role remains strategic in nature, allowing you the freedom to implement the many changes you have made. Senior and middle leaders support you well. They clearly understand their individual and collective responsibilities. Because of this, the school is very well led and managed and staff enjoy working at William Cassidi. Every parent who expressed a view in the online questionnaire rightly believes the school is led and managed well.

Classrooms are happy and productive places. Pupils were clearly enjoying learning during my tour of the school and were happy to talk about their work. Members of the Year 2 class were excitedly building their stone age huts from mud, Year 4 were overjoyed at sharing their visit to a hula hoop morning and those in Year 6 were keen to explain their recent visit to a museum to support their study of the Egyptians.

Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. They also told me that most children are kind to each other most of the time, and that serious disagreements are rare. Older pupils explained their roles of e-safety ambassadors and how they worked in classes across the school to ensure that pupils stay safe online. School councillors, voted into their roles by a democratic process, help to act as problem solvers at playtime. This allows them to mediate and help to sort out any minor incidents. The school's core values of love, care and respect were articulated well during my formal meeting with a group of pupils. Pupils told me, 'We make everyone feel welcome here.' It was clear to me throughout the inspection, by speaking to parents and by reading their comments from the online survey that these values do, indeed, underpin the day-to-day life of the school.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including the pupils' very good behaviour, unfailing politeness and courtesy to visitors. They recognised that pupils were eager to learn and to do their best and that all the staff worked relentlessly to create a caring community where pupils felt happy and safe in school. They also identified the need to improve teaching across the school. Inspectors felt that in some lessons time was not being used well enough to make sure that all pupils were learning all the time and some teachers did not make clear to pupils what they needed to do to improve. In addition, they felt that the more able pupils were not always set hard enough work, particularly in writing and mathematics. You and your highly committed staff have addressed these matters effectively, so that the quality of teaching and learning in all phases of the school has improved, with most being good or better.

You have ensured that the important process of self-evaluation is accurate and you have correctly identified the most important priorities to improve the school. You are right to celebrate the many school strengths, but you astutely recognise the areas that need to be developed. These include ensuring that you robustly challenge those very few parents who do not send their children to school regularly enough. In addition, you recognise the need to raise some teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting, which, even for some of the most able, is extremely untidy and poorly presented, despite the content being of a high quality.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a culture where safeguarding is of the utmost importance and everyone's responsibility. The school's systems and procedures to ensure that children are safe are robust. Governors and staff understand their responsibilities well and are vigilant where the protection and safety of children is concerned. Statutory guidelines are followed regarding policies and the training of staff. Routines at the start and finish of the school day are sound, with parents commenting positively about the care that staff take of their children with so many having to use buses to come to school. All parents spoken to during the inspection feel that their children are safe at school. Children are taught about the potential dangers. Pupils who are e-safety ambassadors teach other pupils and their parents about safe use of the internet or social media. Everyone I spoke to during the inspection assured me that they feel safe in school.

Leaders keep comprehensive records of concerns and communication with wider agencies. Leaders meticulously log their work with families, including the most vulnerable. Referrals to other services are thorough and assessments of what pupils or families need are clear.

Inspection findings

- You lead the school very well and have a good understanding of the changes required to improve the school. Under your leadership, already high standards in key stage 2 are on track to rise even further this year due to the firm foundations and ambition you have established.
- Through your distributed leadership, you have ensured that senior leaders have been able to focus on those key aspects of the school that you recognised needed to improve further. For example, the training, coaching and mentoring of teachers and your innovative approach to mathematics, phonics and literacy teaching means all staff are very motivated and keen to play their part in moving the school forward.
- Your self-evaluation is accurate and honest, and leads to effective development planning. Crucially, you have clearly prioritised aspects that need to be better, focusing on addressing the most important first. You have rightly identified a priority to accelerate the progress of the few disadvantaged pupils in the school. As a result of the focused teaching and robust use of assessment data, pupils are making rapid progress. All of the pupils entitled to pupil premium funding are on track to achieve at least expected standards in the end-of-year assessments and half are on track to achieve higher standards.
- Because your systems to monitor the progress and attainment of pupils are good, you and your teachers have a clear understanding of the progress pupils are making, particularly the most able pupils and those from vulnerable groups. The vast majority of pupils make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as they move through the school and most children in the early years make good progress from their different starting points.
- Outcomes for the most able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have improved significantly this year. During the inspection, it was clear to see that there are significant and additional levels of challenge offered by teachers to the most able pupils, within subjects and across year groups. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive highly individualised support from skilled staff and well-considered resources. Consequently, their progress is good.
- The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. School leaders have developed good systems to monitor the quality of teaching, which shows high-quality provision which in turn leads to better outcomes for pupils. However, leaders have 'taken their eye off the ball' when looking at pupils' work. They have rightly recognised the quality seen in the content of work and the improvements in knowledge, skills and understanding; however, they have failed to identify and deal with poorly presented work. Teachers do not have high enough expectations

of pupils' presentation and much of pupils' writing is untidy. Letters and words are poorly formed and their handwriting is not always easily legible.

- There is no doubting that most pupils enjoy school and they enter with a spring in their step. However, a small number of pupils do not attend well enough and too many parents still take their children on holiday in school time. The persistent absence of a very small number of pupils continues to be a thorn in your side despite the many procedures you have instigated to improve the situation. You are rigorous in your approach and the number of pupils affected continues to reduce. You recognise that you will have to continue to challenge parents further.
- Your work to promote British values is impressive. Pupils have a very good understanding of the reasons for rules and follow school rules diligently. They show respect for other pupils and adults and spoke wisely about the meaning of tolerance. They spoke movingly and maturely about sensitive issues such as refugees, racism and diversity. The school's links with a school in Kenya and the sponsorship of a boy in India remind pupils of the struggles some communities have to face and, as a result, they show a deep empathy and care for others. In addition, you offer a broad religious education curriculum and celebrate festivals such as Diwali and Chinese New Year. Such opportunities, along with the visits to places of worship and visits by adults of other world faiths ensure that pupils have a good understanding of faiths other than Christianity and the range of cultures found among pupils of your school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- you continue to improve the attendance rate by reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent and continue to challenge parents who take their children on holiday during school time
- you raise teachers' expectations of the pupils' presentation and improve the quality of pupils' handwriting.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Bywater
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, parents, pupils and a representative of the local authority. You accompanied me on visits to classrooms, during which I talked to pupils and assessed the quality of their work. I also listened to a number of pupils read. I talked to parents at the beginning of the school day, considered 'free text' responses and took into account 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Staff and pupil responses to their online questionnaire were also considered. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of meetings and pupil progress information.