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Mrs Gillian Pedder
Headteacher
St James and St John C of E Primary School
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Dear Mrs Pedder

Short inspection of St James and St John C of E Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the chair of the governing body, who were both in post at the time of the previous inspection, continue to share high levels of commitment to the pupils of St James and St John Primary School. You are determined that the school continues to thrive, by moving forward and going from strength to strength. The popularity of your school is highly evident in the significant rise in numbers on roll since the previous inspection. You are highly reflective and this shines through the school's self-evaluation, which is detailed and carefully considered. Improvement actions address the right things at the right times. No time is wasted with governors, staff and pupils, too, sharing your high expectations. You and your team work swiftly and effectively to address any occasional dips in performance. For example, following a recent drop in phonics outcomes in Year 1 in 2016, you acted promptly, purchasing new resources and instigating further staff training. Consequently, standards in this aspect are rising quickly and strongly.

The school is a hive of activity, where pupils develop a strong sense of belonging. Pupils talk excitedly about the range of activities on offer, the support their teachers give them and the kindness of their fellow pupils. They radiate confidence in both learning well and in the adults who care for them. Many told me that they always feel listened to and supported especially well by you. Parents too have very positive views with most recommending the school. They, including those who have joined

the school relatively recently, speak highly of the positive impact staff have on their child's well-being and education. You have helped forge a strong community spirit, and families appreciate the warmth of this small village school. One parent commented, 'The school offers flexibility with breakfast and after-school club,. It is a good school for the community: all the children and families know each other. My son is now in Year 6 and we will be sad to leave.' Everyone upholds your high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils are well mannered, thoughtful and conduct themselves extremely well around the school. One parent encapsulated the views of many: 'Great school. Happy children.'

Governors with you, other senior leaders and the local authority are highly effective, all contributing well to the monitoring of the school's effectiveness. There is a strong sense of teamwork. Your monitoring of school performance is comprehensive. You regularly check the quality of teaching and learning and use your findings to shape school improvement actions adeptly. As a result, pupils achieve well and the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. However, although pupils' needs are met well, leaders have not ensured that all statutory information, including curriculum information, is published on the school's website.

You have maintained the strengths identified at the last inspection. Pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 is above that seen nationally. Most pupils achieve the standards expected for their age. The most able pupils achieve particularly well. The proportion of pupils, who were working at the higher levels at key stage 2 and at greater depth at key stage 1, exceeded that seen nationally in all subjects in 2016.

You have also addressed the areas for improvement that inspectors identified previously. Children now make rapid progress in the early years and achieve well. Most children in the Reception class reach a good level of development and are well prepared for Year 1. Standards have risen notably since the previous inspection and are now above those seen nationally. Recently, you have made well-judged changes to the teaching of writing and phonics. More pupils are on track to reach the standards expected for their age this year in these aspects. Nevertheless, you rightly recognise that further improvement to the teaching of writing is now needed, so that middle-ability pupils make good progress and achieve as well as their classmates.

Safeguarding is effective.

Record-keeping is meticulous. Leaders keep watchful oversight on all pupils, especially those who require additional support from time to time. Staff receive regular training and are alert to the signs that might suggest a concern about a pupil's wellbeing or safety. Governors make regular checks for themselves, talking to staff and pupils, satisfying themselves that procedures are clearly understood and consistent across the school. Where occasionally there is uncertainty, governors are quick to reinforce the school's procedures through training days. As a result, staff and governors discharge their responsibilities well.

Pupils have immense confidence in leaders and staff. They describe you as someone who puts 'our safety first'. Pupils talk animatedly about examples of when you and other staff have made changes to school procedures that make a positive difference to their safety. Parents agree, with one, for example, describing you as a 'very positive presence'. Pupils have an excellent knowledge of how to keep themselves safe. They can confidently recite the school's expectations and have every confidence that adults sort things out quickly and effectively, if the need arises. They have an extremely mature understanding of how to keep themselves safe online, including being alert to the dangers of cyber bullying.

The school's safeguarding policy is kept under regular review and adheres to the latest government guidance. Further checks, including those undertaken by governors who hold responsibility for safeguarding or health and safety, further enhance the school's work in this aspect. Parents agree that the children are well looked after and kept safe. One parent noted, 'St James and St John provides an exciting, interesting, warm, safe and stimulating environment for my children.' Many parents spoke positively about staff who go the extra mile to ensure that their child's emotional, dietary or medical needs are catered for extremely well.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision including the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, pupils' achievement in writing and reading, girls' progress in key stage 1, how well leaders have ensured that the school has continued to improve pupils' progress including for children in the early years, and the effectiveness of the teaching of science.
- School leaders recognise that standards in phonics have marginally declined over the last three years and are now just below those seen nationally. This year, leaders have redoubled their efforts, developing teachers' skills and expertise securely and developing the school's resources appropriately. Current pupils apply their phonics skills well to reading unknown texts. They use a variety of strategies competently, including referring to pictorial cues, to read fluently and accurately. Pupils in other year groups make good and sometimes rapid progress in reading. They enthuse about reading and are extremely knowledgeable about books and their authors. Class readers, such as 'Five children and it' in Year 4, are extremely popular and motivate pupils to further secure a lifelong love of reading. The school's pupil librarians take their responsibilities seriously. They enjoy gathering ideas from their peers about new books for the library and are proud that they are significantly involved in keeping the school's reading material relevant and appealing. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well in reading across the school. Activities such as the recent celebration of World Book Day, including a book swap initiative, are popular with pupils. As a result, pupils achieve well and standards in Year 1 are rising and now beginning to match the high standards evident at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.

- Pupils write for a range of purposes including producing play scripts, recounts and explanation texts. In lessons, pupils listen attentively and work hard to hone their skills. Work is presented well. Pupils achieve well in key stage 1 and this year more pupils are on track to meet the standards expected for their age at the end of key stage 2. However, progress of middle-ability pupils has not yet accelerated as much as is required. This is because teachers' planning does not always cater well enough for pupils' next learning steps. For example, some middle-attaining pupils in key stage 2 are still developing their mastery of grammatical devices in order to write accurate, polished sentences.
- Girls are making better progress than in the past and catching up quickly, especially in key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, more girls are on track to meet the standard required in the Year 1 phonics screening check than in the past. Differences between boys' and girls' achievement are closing rapidly and in some year groups have closed completely. This trend is replicated in the early years where more girls are on track to achieve a good level of development than in previous years. You have overhauled the curriculum, ensuring that it appeals equally to both boys and girls. Teaching is highly effective. Pupils listen well and try their best. Work is presented to a high standard and pupils are keen learners, working hard to develop and improve their skills. Consequently, both boys and girls make good progress and achieve well in all subjects.
- Science is taught effectively. Recent changes to the school's curriculum ensure that pupils learn through first-hand experiences to investigate and explore scientific concepts. Pupils have regular opportunities to work scientifically and are adept at observing closely, using their findings and ideas to suggest answers to scientific questions. For example, pupils in Year 4 could group materials together confidently according to whether things were solids, liquids or gases. Pupils' scientific skills are developing well and many are working at the standards expected for their age.
- Attendance is rising and is now in line with that seen nationally. In recent times, there have been marked improvements to the attendance of disadvantaged pupils especially since this time last year. Pupils say they enjoy attending school immensely because 'their teachers are helpful and lessons are fun'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers plan tasks that match middle-ability pupils' starting points more sharply in writing so that their progress continues to accelerate
- the school's website includes all the required statutory information.

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 Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the chair of the governing body and one other governor, and a representative of the local authority. I observed learning in most classes, all jointly with the headteacher. We heard pupils read and looked at pupils' work including the early years learning journeys, pupils' writing books and science work. I analysed a range of school documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan, and safeguarding checks and policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I considered the 54 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and three written responses from school governors, and I spoke to parents at the beginning of the day. I spoke to 10 pupils in key stage 2.