

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Camilla McGregor
Headteacher
St James' CofE Primary School
Wolverley Crescent
Oldbury
West Midlands
B69 1BG

Dear Mrs Camilla McGregor

Short inspection of St James' CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 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. Your ambition for the school is evident. As a result, the culture of this school is one of high expectations, care and consideration for all. You ensure that every pupil is known as an individual and is supported to achieve their best. You, your staff and governors have created a strong school community with Church of England values at the heart of the ethos for all pupils. Strong partnerships exist between the school, the church, the diocese and the local authority.

Since the last inspection, the school has been through a considerable change in staffing. You were appointed in April 2015 and you have worked to build an effective and motivated leadership team. Together, you have focused on relentlessly improving the quality and dependability of teaching across the school. Whole-school approaches in English and mathematics have ensured consistency, with clear expectations which support teachers in the early stages of their career.

You and your senior leaders know the school well and have quickly galvanised the staffing team behind your ambition for further improvement. You have recognised good practice in the school, evaluated strengths and weaknesses accurately and identified your priorities for improvement clearly. You know that other leaders who are new to their roles need to develop their leadership skills further, so that they can help you to drive improvements. Year group leaders appreciate the opportunities and support they receive from their senior colleagues.

Parents are extremely positive about the school's work. Those who spoke to me informally at the start of the day rightly praised the school's nurturing culture. They also strongly appreciated the way you and your staff are prepared to go the extra mile to support individual pupils whatever their needs. This means that staff prepare pupils well for secondary school, academically, socially and emotionally.

Governors have provided stability and direction during a period of significant change in the school's leadership. They have helped the school to reach its current settled position. They have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's performance. Governors welcome the quality and detail of information you provide for them. This means that they can be robust in their efforts to hold the leadership team to account.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the school's many strengths in teaching and learning. They asked leaders to increase the opportunities pupils have to read more widely in a range of subjects. The school responded to this challenge by raising the profile of reading across the school. A new school library has been established. Reading areas that are vibrant, stimulating and cosy have been created around the school. These are places pupils can choose to go to and read. Pupils are taken to the local library and there has been considerable investment in a range of reading resources and technology. This is having a positive effect and pupils can talk knowledgeably about the books they are reading. You were also asked to increase the opportunities pupils have to investigate and work independently on a range of problem-solving activities. You have addressed this very effectively through your 'concrete, pictorial, abstract' system, which has led to standards in mathematics, by the time the pupils leave school, being above the national standards. Pupils are motivated and enthused by their learning experiences in mathematics and they rise to the challenges that deepen their thinking.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' welfare is of paramount importance to you, your staff and governors. You have made all the appropriate checks on people who work or volunteer at the school. In addition, all staff and governors have received safeguarding training that reflects the most up-to-date guidance. Staff are ever vigilant to any changes in pupils' behaviour. They report concerns promptly and leaders responsible for safeguarding follow up any concerns assiduously. Where it is necessary to involve social services in a safeguarding matter, leaders are tenacious in ensuring that pupils' needs are prioritised. Comprehensive and systematic records of safeguarding concerns and actions are kept and regularly analysed in order to identify patterns and evaluate the impact of safeguarding actions on pupils and their families. In this way the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Pupils feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. They report that bullying is rare, but that when it does happen, teachers deal with it effectively. They are hugely proud of their school; their behaviour is always good and at times impeccable.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection visit, we focused on the progress of pupils in key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics and the actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils and those who are vulnerable. We also looked at the actions you have taken to improve attendance and the effectiveness of the new leadership team.
- You took decisive action to improve teaching in key stage 1. Pupils are currently making good progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. They demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. They show focus and resilience as they work and do not give up in the face of challenges. High expectations by teachers have led to a widening of vocabulary and pupils are ambitious in their choice of language.
- Valuable additional opportunities are offered to disadvantaged pupils, including curriculum enrichment activities which otherwise they may not have access to. Leaders ensure that the additional pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils academically, socially and emotionally. By the time pupils leave school, disadvantaged pupils have made good progress in reading and writing and excellent progress in mathematics. This brings their attainment in line with all pupils nationally.
- A highly effective 'well-being team' comprises a behaviour mentor; a learning mentor; a child and family support worker; and a lead family support and safeguarding officer. They work sensitively with pupils who have vulnerabilities. They work collectively to overcome barriers to learning and help them to be better prepared to engage socially with peers and to make positive relationships. Additionally, they support the emotional development of pupils, raising self-esteem and levels of confidence. Pupils appreciate the way the school works to ensure their behaviour is the best it can be.
- You have taken stringent action in an attempt to improve attendance, including meeting with parents when their child's attendance has been poor. You are able to identify patterns in absence because of the detailed analysis leaders produce. This enables you to target your efforts accurately. The newly appointed family support worker has worked tirelessly to forge trusted relationships with families. As a result of your actions, attendance has steadily improved over time and those families with persistent absence are improving their rates of attendance. However, rates of attendance are still not high enough. The school needs to continue to seek ways of engaging with those families who are the hardest to convince that frequent attendance is essential.
- Your leadership team has established systems that are informative about the performance of the school. Leaders have established an open culture of coaching and mentoring. Consequently, staff are highly reflective and committed to improving their practice. However, further development and support are needed for middle leaders to drive rapid improvement to secure outstanding teaching and learning across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders' skills develop further and they are held fully to account for pupils' achievements in the year groups of the school, where they are responsible
- they continue to drive improvements in teaching to raise its quality towards outstanding
- pupils' attendance improves by working with parents who are not ensuring that their children's attendance is as good as it can be.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sandwell. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other members of the leadership team, other members of the school staff and representatives of the governing body. I also met with your local authority adviser. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look in their books. I also spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 41 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke with staff. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of the governors, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.