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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Lisa Nicolson
Headteacher
St John's Primary and Nursery School
French Street
Old Town
Southampton
Hampshire
SO14 2AU

Dear Mrs Nicolson

Short inspection of St John's Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Much has changed since your appointment. You have recruited staff throughout the school and recently created a new leadership team. Together with your assistant headteachers, you provide clear leadership, drive and enthusiasm that motivate staff and enable pupils to achieve well.

You have improved outcomes for children in the early years and for pupils in key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics. All groups of pupils typically make good progress, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. However, you recognise that the 2016 outcomes for Year 6 pupils were not good enough. You responded with urgency to these disappointing key stage 2 results. Current pupils are making rapid progress as a result of your improvements to teaching and learning. However, you are aware that the proportion of pupils achieving at a higher standard needs to improve further.

Teachers told me that they feel empowered by your leadership to explore the most effective ways of helping pupils to learn. You support teachers well and encourage them to share their best practice with other schools. This inspires staff, so morale is high. You recognise that staff changes have hampered the pace of improvement in some classes within the school. Your investment in teachers' professional development is helping you to recruit and retain high-quality staff, bringing stability to the school. Governors play an important role in that they provide helpful support

and challenge to your leadership.

You have maintained the strengths identified in the last inspection. St John's is clearly at the heart of your diverse community, and pupils and parents are rightly proud of their school and all that it achieves. A typical parental view was: 'I can't praise the staff enough for all they have done over the years for my children.' You support new arrivals to the country well and parents value the way you embrace all languages. The pupils I spoke with said that they enjoy school, particularly the extra-curricular activities, visitors and the many trips that complement the vibrant curriculum. I listened to pupils rehearse enthusiastically for their forthcoming performance at the regional heats of a music festival. The anticipation of winning was tangible.

Pupils are keen to work hard and improve their work. Behaviour and conduct around school are extremely positive. St John's is an inclusive school where everyone is encouraged to aspire, improve and 'go forward together'. This is a sentiment captured in the words of the school's song, and echoed by many pupils. You are very clear about how you will continue to build on these strengths. For example, you are keen to develop pupils' resilience in mathematics so that they are able to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses as learners.

At the time of the last inspection you were asked to ensure that children in the early years were supported to achieve better. Your newly appointed early years leader has taken swift action to address this and outcomes are improving this year for all children, particularly in writing. We observed children writing instructions to sow seeds. Adults extended children's vocabulary well. You were rightly proud of the writing on display, which shows children are forming letters well and spelling words accurately. More children in the early years are demonstrating high attainment in reading, writing and mathematics than in the past.

You have accurately identified that there are other aspects of the school's work which need to improve further. We agreed to make these areas the focus for this inspection. In the past, teaching did not match the needs of all pupils. We discussed how this had not prepared Year 6 pupils well enough for the 2016 reading and mathematics tests. You have identified that pupils require even more opportunities to develop vocabulary, to strengthen problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics, and to make inferences when reading.

You have improved the quality of teaching by working with other schools in your cooperative. You have recruited specialist staff and strengthened planning and resourcing in mathematics and reading. In addition, you and other leaders are effective in monitoring the quality of teaching. You know your pupils well which enables you to thoroughly check teachers' assessments and planning for learning. It is evident that teachers' questioning and feedback which is part of your 'catch up, keep up' strategy is ensuring that pupils make rapid progress. We observed this approach in most classes, across reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, and despite some pupils having low starting points, more pupils are working at age-related expectations than before.

Safeguarding is effective.

Many pupils spoke to me about feeling safe, welcomed and secure in school. St John's offers an especially nurturing and caring community. A rigorous culture of safeguarding is in place. All the adults who work with pupils are well trained and understand what risks pupils might face. Pupils told me that they were confident that they could share any worries or concerns with staff, and know that they would receive help and support. You ensure that pupils are taught about keeping safe, including when using the internet. As one pupil summed up: 'Be careful of friend requests, they may be a stranger or hacker, and false links could lead to a virus!'

You robustly promote attendance while sensitively managing the specific context of your families' requests for religious observance and extended overseas visits. That said, more needs to be done to ensure that rates of persistent absence, particularly of disadvantaged pupils, improves.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we looked at: the progress that pupils in key stage 2 are making in reading and mathematics; the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in key stage 2; the effectiveness of subject leaders; the impact of senior leaders on pupils' progress; and attendance.
- In 2016, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 6 were below the national average. Progress was too slow for some pupils in these subjects. This is no longer the case. All pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are now making good progress across key stage 2. Few pupils were working at the higher standard in 2016. You identify rightly that this remains a priority for your work, particularly in Year 5 and Year 6.
- All leaders, including those who are new to their roles, thrive under your good guidance. Leaders of English and mathematics are highly motivated and make a very effective team. Their expertise and enthusiasm has developed the understanding and confidence of others. They use their specialist knowledge to coach other staff with the result that teaching is improving rapidly. There are now better opportunities for reasoning and problem-solving in mathematics lessons, and for the development of vocabulary and comprehension skills in English. Since September, strong teaching and assessment have ensured that pupils make rapid progress. More pupils are currently working at a high standard as a result of well-targeted, consistent support.
- Pupils across the school, including those that are disadvantaged, are making good progress in reading. You have adapted teaching methods so that teachers sharpen pupils' comprehension skills and develop their understanding of more challenging vocabulary. For example, we observed pupils debating the meaning of such words as 'midriff' and 'gesticulating', and also observed a teacher questioning pupils so that they justified their inferences from texts effectively.
- You have also focused on developing a culture of reading across the school. High-quality teaching of phonics helps to foster a love of reading and underpins

the good progress that younger pupils make. Your creative strategies, such as the 'reading challenge' and rewards of tokens to purchase new books, encourage older pupils to read frequently.

- Pupils in key stage 2, including those who are disadvantaged, are making good progress in mathematics. You have improved teachers' subject knowledge so that problem-solving skills and reasoning are taught well. Learning environments offer useful models and supports for learning. Practical resources are also being used effectively to support pupils' learning. For example, older pupils used diagrams alongside their calculations to reason and explain their thinking. You have also strengthened adults' feedback to pupils so that they are prompted to refine their work.
- Pupils across the school engage enthusiastically in rich discussion. Your observations over the course of last term, echoed in our joint visits to classrooms, tell you that pupils are now much more competent when reasoning in reading and mathematics than they were previously. You have created more opportunities for pupils to rehearse these skills across the curriculum, so that they deepen their understanding. I saw this in the way Year 6 pupils drew conclusions from their investigations in science.
- Your rewards system to improve attendance is valued by pupils. Younger pupils take great pride in gaining 'Punctuality Panda' for arriving at school on time. Pupils now attend school similarly to all pupils nationally. More pupils also come to school every day. Pupils are motivated by the aptly named '99' ice cream which they receive to celebrate achieving at least 99% attendance. However, you recognise that there is still work to be done to reduce rates of persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. This is reflected in your current plans for improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they increase the proportions of pupils who attain the highest standards in all year groups
- persistent absence is tackled effectively so that more pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, attend school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aspland
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to review your self-evaluation. We visited each year group, where we observed learning. I spoke with pupils, listened to them read and scrutinised work in their books. I also met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.

The 119 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were analysed, as well as taking into account the views of parents whom I spoke to informally at the beginning of the school day. I also examined the views of staff through the 37 online responses to Ofsted's survey and through discussions with representatives. I analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, and I checked the school's own information about pupils' achievement. I took into account external evaluations of aspects of the school's work.