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Miss Jo Warnock
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Dear Miss Warnock

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Johns Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 October 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that safeguarding records provide sufficient detail about how leaders respond to any concerns about pupils, and the outcome of action taken as a result
- check that all leaders consider thoroughly whether their work is successfully improving pupils' outcomes.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team, middle leaders, governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day. I reviewed the school improvement plan and a range of other documentation that you provided. Together, we made brief visits to a number of classes across key stages 1 and 2. During these visits, I spoke with pupils and looked at some of their work. I also reviewed an additional sample of pupils' work that I selected.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a full governing body has been formed, replacing the previous interim executive board. The role of chair changed hands at this point, but there has been strong continuity of membership between both governing boards. Four new teachers started in September 2017.

Main findings

There is no doubt that this is an improving school. Stable senior leadership and strengthening middle leadership have supported the successful drive to tackle areas previously requiring improvement. The school plan sets out precisely the steps that still need to be taken to move the school securely to good, making close links between planned actions and the intended outcomes. There is a clear and well-established cycle whereby leaders use their evaluations to inform next steps within tight but manageable timeframes.

Middle leaders have much more clarity about their roles and accountabilities now. They convey a genuine sense of ownership of the shared drive for improvement. Training and working towards professional qualifications and in partnership with other leaders, within and beyond the school, have enhanced their confidence and competence. Middle leaders have a secure grasp of how their roles and individual action plans contribute to and fit in with the bigger picture. They are mindful of the difference that their actions make. However, when reflecting and evaluating their success, there is a tendency to place too much emphasis on how adults' practice has changed, rather than probing deeply to check how their work has affected pupils' learning and progress.

Sustainable governance arrangements have been established and the governing body is now entering its second year of operation. Governors draw on a wealth of expertise from their other current and previous roles. While taking account of their statutory obligations, governors are sharply focused on checking the successful implementation of the school improvement plan. They are clearly unafraid to provide school leaders with appropriate challenge in the shared drive for improvement, but the relationship is suitably constructive and supportive.

The quality of teaching and learning in writing has improved markedly since the previous inspection. Year 6 leavers last year had made broadly similar progress across key stage 2 compared with other pupils nationally. Pupils write for a rich range of purposes in a variety of subjects.

Work in pupils' books and on display reflects learning across a broad range of subjects, although the quality of written work tends to be stronger in English and mathematics than other subjects. Pupils benefit from exciting and inspiring opportunities to carry out their own scientific investigations. However, the most able pupils' science work does not consistently show how their skills have been developed, for example through developing explanations or drawing conclusions.

Leaders accurately evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time in different classes, identifying correctly that it is increasingly effective. In the small number of classes where teaching is not yet consistently strong enough, leaders know the specific areas requiring improvement and are taking steps accordingly. Leaders set pertinent next steps for teachers and support them to improve their practice. Leaders take an effective cyclical approach to checking that the support they offer leads to the desired improvements. Rightly, they point towards the consistency of strong practice among longer-serving members of staff as a mark of leaders' success in lifting the quality of teaching.

During my visits to classrooms, a number of strengths were readily apparent. The school has a very calm and purposeful atmosphere, combined with attractive, supportive and well-respected classroom environments. Teachers' expectations were high and pupils were working hard and behaving well. Reviewing the work in pupils' books suggests that this is the norm. I heard teachers draw skilfully on a wide range of questions for different purposes. Teachers take considered action to meet the needs of specific pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or those that speak English as an additional language. This includes providing carefully chosen resources, and the purposeful and targeted deployment of additional adults throughout the school.

A number of mitigating factors about the school's context mean that headline data about the pupils' achievement does not truly reflect the pace and extent of improvement evident in the school. End-of-key-stage results show that pupils' attainment and progress overall are rising, but the rate of improvement appears slow in key stage 2, especially in reading and mathematics. Provisional results for 2017 show that standards at the end of Year 6 remain below national figures. However, the exceptionally high numbers of pupils that arrive or leave in the middle of a year or key stage pull these figures down considerably. An increasing proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language, sometimes arriving in older year groups with limited or no English. Leaders' analysis provides convincing evidence that a constantly shifting pupil population has had a far greater impact on overall achievement figures at key stage 2 than it does further down the school.

Despite the proactive steps that leaders' take to help pupils make strong progress whenever they join the school, often there is not time for them to catch up with other pupils nationally. Pupils who start in early years, or have been in the school since it opened, do markedly better.

Outcomes are rising more securely and quickly up to the end of key stage 1. From often low starting points, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of early years is similar to the national average. The number of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check last year was much closer to the national average than the previous year. By the end of Year 2, the proportion working at age-related expectations rose above national figures in mathematics, and the gap was closing in reading and writing. Differences comparing outcomes for disadvantaged pupils with other pupils nationally are diminishing exceptionally well up to the end of key stage 1. Leaders' tracking and analysis of how well different groups of pupils are achieving across year groups is detailed and precise. They use this information well to plan steps to tackle any underachievement and decide overall priorities for improvement.

The previous inspection found that safeguarding was effective. Consequently, I did not explore this aspect of the school's work with you at length during my visit. The single central register meets requirements. Leaders have established suitable links with other relevant agencies and professionals for the protection and welfare of pupils. Safeguarding records show that leaders take appropriate action in response to concerns affecting pupils' welfare or safety. However, we agreed that these records are not consistently thorough or precise enough in recording the actions taken by leaders and what happens as a result.

External support

Feeling confident in the capacity of school leaders and governors, the local authority has reduced the amount and nature of the support it provides since the previous inspection. This has enabled school leaders to drive improvement themselves, deciding and requesting the most relevant assistance from the local authority as required. The improvement adviser continues to provide suitable support and challenge focused on scrutiny of leaders' evaluations, improvement planning and analysis of pupils' performance. Leaders are proactive in working with other schools to support their drive for improvement. They seek to challenge their own views about the success of the improvements they are making and compare the quality of their pupils' work with that seen in good and outstanding schools elsewhere.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn

Her Majesty's Inspector