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Miss Janine Kenna
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Kenna

Short inspection of St John Fisher RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong, confident leadership is well supported by the deputy headteacher and by other leaders in the school. Together with governors and senior leaders, you have successfully created a happy and caring atmosphere, where all feel secure and valued. You have developed a culture of high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour, and have fostered a culture of respect, tolerance and good manners. There is strong support for leadership among staff, who feel they are well led. As a result, their morale is high. Staff, pupils and the vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are very supportive of the school and appreciate the work it does. Parents reported that their children were taught well and cared for. Pupils spoke of their school as '...like belonging to a big family where there is always someone who will look after you and make sure you are happy'.

The skilled and knowledgeable governors meet their statutory duties effectively. They keep a close check on the work of the school, visiting classes regularly. Governors support and challenge you effectively. They work together with leaders and local authority partners to ensure that pupils make good progress. Leaders and governors accurately identify key priorities for further improvement and take effective actions to address them.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that all pupils were given sufficient opportunities and guidance to develop their ideas fully, so that they

had time to review their learning and received clear feedback to help them improve their work. You have addressed this by revising the way in which the school provides feedback to pupils. You have also ensured that parents understand how this happens, by regularly sending books home for pupils to share their learning and progress. You have developed the timetable to ensure that pupils have time to reflect on, develop and improve their work. Older pupils spoke positively about how they edit their work and take pride in their finished pieces, while also valuing the drafting process as a valuable learning experience. You were also asked to strengthen the leadership and management of the school by enhancing the professional development of middle leaders. This was to enable them to monitor more rigorously, so that they were clear about the progress pupils made across their subject areas. You have done this by ensuring that your skilled and talented senior leaders support and mentor the middle leaders, helping them to monitor lessons, analyse data and check pupils' work to ensure that they are achieving the planned outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and are fit for purpose. The school maintains thorough records. The safeguarding culture at the school is strong. Staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe. They are well trained and know what to do if they have any safeguarding concerns.

Pupils know they are too young to use social media and know what steps they should take to keep themselves safe online. The school also works hard to ensure that parents are aware of issues like cyber bullying and internet safety. Pupils know what constitutes bullying and feel that there is very little bullying in the school. They trust that the adults around them will help to keep them safe.

Inspection findings

- During our initial meeting, we agreed that I would look into how effective leaders' actions are in addressing the barriers to learning of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding. This was because, despite this group being fairly small, their progress and outcomes were below that of other pupils nationally and below their peers in this school in both 2016 and 2017. I found that some of this group also had complex special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. On checking the progress of current pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding, I found it was at least in line with their peers, and in some cases better. This is because leaders know individuals' needs well and provide well for them. They have developed strong relationships with families, which have resulted in the school being able to engage parents more fully. Leaders not only ensure that timely support and good-quality interventions are provided, they also regularly monitor the impact of this work to ensure that it is having the required impact and speeding up progress for this group.
- I then considered the impact of leaders' actions on ensuring that pupils achieve all they are capable of, by the end of each key stage, in reading, writing and mathematics. I looked in particular at progress across key stage 1 because, in 2016,

several pupils who had achieved a good level of development by the end of the foundation stage did not achieve the required standard by the end of key stage 1. The school had also been addressing the progress of girls in mathematics, and of boys in reading in key stage 2. Leaders were keen to ensure that more pupils achieved greater depth in these areas. I found that both English and mathematics were well led by staff who had a sharp awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In the early years, reading is taught well. It was really brought to life, for example, by the way in which teachers skilfully linked the text 'Peace at last' with learning across the curriculum. They had flooded both the indoor and outdoor learning environments with a range of rich learning opportunities for children to develop their language, mathematical and social skills. As a result of these exciting and engaging learning opportunities, children demonstrated their good understanding of storybook language when 'reading' and retelling stories. They made story maps, and cooperated as to the best way to build a bear cave or a dream catcher, 'so baby bear gets happy dreams'. They used estimation and counting skills very effectively to count objects beyond 40. Adult questioning enhanced and supported learning, while ensuring that independence and curiosity were also developed.

- Progress in reading has been well supported from the early years into key stage 1 by the school's approach to the teaching of phonics. As a result of daily phonics lessons, Reception children are confident at sounding out their own words. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 can apply this knowledge when writing. Pupils in key stage 1 are starting to read whole words, which is helping to speed up their reading and improve fluency. This good start in reading is built on in key stage 2, where pupils have good opportunities to reread and revisit quality texts. This approach has been particularly helpful in encouraging boys, who were previously reluctant readers, because it has boosted their confidence.
- Comprehension skills are particularly well developed in Years 5 and 6, because pupils have frequent opportunities to read across the curriculum. Pupils of different abilities are provided with increasingly more complex texts and, as a result, they develop their skills while being challenged at an appropriate level.
- The school has focused on skills teaching in writing. When writing in literacy books, the majority of pupils in key stage 1 understand what words like verbs and adjectives do. They can use basic punctuation correctly and compose simple sentences. However, the quality of their writing is sometimes limited by the choice of vocabulary, because some pupils do not write the rich language they speak and teachers do not consistently require them to do so. The skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling that are being taught in literacy are not consistently applied when writing in other subjects. In key stage 1, there are limited opportunities to write at length, or in different ways in subjects like history and geography. This is because the amount pupils write, or the type of writing they produce, is often limited by the space provided on the worksheet they are given. By contrast, pupils in Years 5 and 6 produce a richer range of writing, not because they are older but because they are given more opportunities to write for more of the lesson. They show a good awareness of audience and have opportunities to write for a range of purposes in subjects like history, geography and science.
- In mathematics, leaders have rightly identified that, to develop mastery skills, pupils need experience of reasoning and explaining their ideas. This is happening very

effectively in key stage 2, where pupils routinely have opportunities to reflect on and discuss their learning. Leaders plan to develop this further in key stage 1.

- The level of challenge in mathematics lacks consistency across the school. In Reception, children routinely engage in open-ended challenging activities. For example, a child made an estimate of 140 when looking at how many sheep were on a piece of wrapping paper. She then carefully and accurately counted them and, on realising that there were 48 sheep there, could explain that her original estimate had been too high, stating, '140 is lots more than 48'. In contrast, when estimating in Year 1, pupils were limited by the space on their worksheet to record objects. As a result, they were limited to drawing around cubes within 10, which they did not need to estimate because they could easily count. Consequently, mathematical skills were not being developed because the level of challenge was too low. When looking at mathematics books across the school, it was evident that significant work has been done to help ensure that pupils have good knowledge of number bonds, place value and multiplication tables. This knowledge helps them carry out accurate mental calculations. When looking at books with pupils, it was clear that some spend too long doing what they can already do before moving on to something they find challenging. The most able mathematicians in all year groups feel that they can start with the challenge, rather than having to do the task set before moving on to the challenge. In Year 6, pupils spoke positively about ability sets teaching which takes place three days a week. One told me she liked it best because the work is hard and makes her think.
- Work has been done with parents to help promote positive expectations of girls in mathematics. As a result, girls display positive attitudes toward mathematics, and assessment shows that more are now on track to meet the expectations of greater depth by the end of key stage 2.
- I also considered how well leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics. I found that the school has developed this area of its work well. Subjects are resourced well and led by knowledgeable staff. Pupils told me about the range of trips they have been on and the visitors who come into school to enrich the curriculum further. The curriculum is broad and all national curriculum subjects are covered. Pupils benefit from the fact that specialists deliver music, Spanish and some aspects of the physical education curriculum. Science is delivered in a very 'hands-on' way, and pupils spoke enthusiastically about the experiments they have done. In Year 6, pupils had the skills and autonomy to decide how they would present their learning about the heart in science, and displayed their knowledge in a range of ways, including poetry, word searches, diagrams and explanation writing. Leaders acknowledge that the methods of recording that have been used for some subjects, like history and geography, have limited pupils' opportunities to be creative and develop other skills, like writing. However, there are plans in place to address this.
- Finally, I looked at what actions the school has taken to improve attendance for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and found that the school has maintained above-average attendance levels for most groups of pupils. You do not authorise term-time absence and do all that can reasonably be expected to ensure that pupils attend school regularly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- where there are inconsistencies in practice between year groups, the strong practice evident in some key stages is shared across the school
- all pupils, particularly the most able in mathematics, are moved on to new challenges quickly so that they reach their full potential
- pupils' writing in all subjects is as good as it is in English, so that they get opportunities to apply the skills they have learned across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Lou Anderson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I held meetings with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, governors, the school business manager and a representative from the local authority.
- I visited lessons in the early years and key stages 1 and 2 to observe learning and hear pupils reading.
- I scrutinised pupils' work in English, mathematics, topic, religious education and science books.
- I talked to pupils about their learning, both at formal and informal times throughout the day.
- I met with parents at the start of the school day and I analysed responses to Parent View, as well as responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil questionnaires.
- I scrutinised documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, information on pupils' attendance and documentation related to safeguarding, as well as the school's assessment and behaviour information.