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Mrs R Webster
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Webster

Short inspection of St Paul's CofE Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a caring and welcoming school, where you value all pupils as individuals. The school is highly regarded within the community for its inclusivity. The school's Christian values and the motto, 'A small school with a big heart', underpin all that you do.

Since the last inspection, senior leadership has remained stable. You have an established and effective relationship with your partner infant school. Together, you ensure that there is a smooth transition for pupils. Your leadership creates an environment where the well-being of pupils and staff is of paramount importance. Staff and pupils who responded to the online survey stated that they are proud to be part of the community.

Pupils behave well in all areas of school. They are polite and well mannered. Pupils were keen to tell me that the best thing about the school is that, 'Everyone is kind. We all have a voice.' As a consequence, pupils thrive and attendance is good.

Leaders have created a diverse curriculum that ensures that pupils benefit from a broad range of experiences. Staff know pupils well and they provide interesting learning activities both inside and outside. Relationships between staff and pupils are supportive and nurturing, resulting in pupils feeling part of a 'big family'. Pupils enjoy their time at school and value the wide range of activities on offer.

The majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are positive about the school. They value the fact that their children's individual needs are met. They also appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities that their children have access to. A common view was summed up in the words of one parent, who said: 'St Paul's CofE is an absolute asset to our community. It is clear that the staff are a true team and have the children's interests at the heart of all they do.'

At the last inspection, the lead inspector asked you to raise pupils' attainment by ensuring that they are challenged and know how to improve their work. You have addressed this issue effectively. Across the school, teachers consistently use the school's agreed protocols for marking and feedback. Pupils value the work that teachers do to help them improve and, consequently, pupils make good progress from their starting points.

The previous inspector also noted that leaders needed to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that the plan for improvement included measurable targets. Leaders know their school well and have a strong grasp of the school's strengths and areas for development. Your school improvement plan accurately identifies aspects of teaching and learning that can be improved. There are clear, measurable targets that ensure that all staff are held to account for pupils' progress. You regularly review the school improvement plan with staff and governors to ensure that targets are achieved.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that the safety and welfare of all pupils are given the highest priority. Your safeguarding policies and procedures are of a high standard and all staff adhere to them. Staff and governors undertake regular training to ensure that they are kept up to date with the most recent legislation. Consequently, they know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils. Leaders know their pupils and families well and support them when they face difficulties. Vetting procedures for the recruitment of staff and governors are thorough. Suitable checks are also made on visitors to school.

Pupils feel safe and well looked after at the school. Pupils know that they can talk to any members of staff if they are worried about anything. They are in agreement that bullying does not happen. You are keen to ensure that parents, as well as pupils, understand any potential risks when they are using the internet. Parents who completed Parent View were very positive about the school's work to keep their children safe.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection, we agreed on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first looked at how leaders are improving the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This is because, in 2016, attendance was low for these pupils. We also looked at how leaders are reducing

persistent absence for all pupils, especially those who have SEN and/or disabilities. There are effective systems to check pupils' attendance. Records are detailed and thorough. Your staff follow up all absences swiftly and take relevant action. You know the reasons why pupils are absent from school and you work effectively with families and external agencies to improve attendance. As a result of actions taken, attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has risen and persistent absence for all pupils is reducing.

- The second key line of enquiry looked at pupils' progress in mathematics. Leaders recognised that the teaching of mathematics required further improvement, and you wasted no time in making mathematics a key focus for school improvement plans. You brokered external support to help you lead improvements in mathematics across the school. Consequently, teachers received training to deepen their knowledge and skills, especially in how they can challenge pupils further. Pupils' books show that they have opportunities to understand mathematical concepts through regular use of problem-solving and reasoning. Work in pupils' books demonstrates the stronger progress they are making towards the highest standard. In 2017, the number of pupils attaining at the expected and highest standard increased. Despite this rise, you recognise that pupils' reasoning skills need further improvement, so that a greater proportion of pupils achieve at the highest standard in mathematics.
- Another key line of enquiry considered pupils' progress in reading. This is because, in previous years, pupils' progress was below the national average. You have taken effective action to improve achievement and have implemented a range of different strategies to raise the profile of reading. Governors are involved in this action and actively celebrate pupils who read regularly. Teachers have accessed training and regularly review and improve their teaching. In lessons, teachers have placed a high priority on developing pupils' love of reading. There is a good variety of new and interesting texts for pupils to access. Pupils talked enthusiastically about books and said that there is a wide range of books in school which capture their interest. However, you agree that the school has further work to do to ensure that all pupils progress more rapidly, and that greater numbers achieve at the expected and highest standard.
- The last key line of enquiry considered pupils' progress in writing. This is because pupils' achievement in writing at the expected standard has been below the national average in recent years. Leaders have reviewed the teaching of writing and made improvements to the curriculum. The English leader supports staff effectively to ensure that they plan activities which challenge pupils in their learning. There are many opportunities for teachers to work with other schools and each other. As a result, they are confident when assessing pupils' writing. There is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics, spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. Teachers provide varied and interesting writing opportunities across the curriculum and, consequently, achievement is rising, especially for the most able. However, you have identified that difficulties with spelling and vocabulary are still preventing some pupils from making more rapid progress. We agreed that this needs to be an area for further improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics so that more pupils reach the highest standard
- they improve the accuracy of pupils' spelling and broaden their vocabulary so that their writing continues to improve
- they further develop pupils' reading skills so more pupils make more rapid progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Kynaston
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the English leader and the administration manager. I spoke with members of the governing body, an officer from the local authority and a group of pupils. Documents were scrutinised, including your self-evaluation, school improvement plan, external audits, attendance information and safeguarding checks. I reviewed pupils' achievement records. I also visited lessons with you to speak with pupils and look at examples of their work. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, at breaktimes and as they moved around the school. I reviewed minutes of meetings of the governing body. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 16 free-text responses. I also took account of eight responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and eight responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. I completed a review of the school's website.