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Mrs Pauline Bloor
Headteacher
St John's CofE (A) Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bloor

Short inspection of St John's CofE (A) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2018, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your leadership team and your governors have a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development and have identified well-focused priorities for improvement. Your leadership team is now at full capacity and you deploy senior staff effectively so that they can address areas to improve quickly. They are having a positive impact and as a result the school continues to improve.

The Christian ethos underpins the core values of the school and welcomes all pupils and families. You know your pupils and families well. Parents and carers appreciate your visible presence and 'hands on' approach. You manage the high mobility of pupils effectively and provide good support for vulnerable pupils and pupils with additional needs. By the end of key stage 2, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress and disadvantaged pupils make very good progress.

Parents value the care and support given to their children. Parents made comments such as: 'St John's is a supportive and nurturing environment for my child to grow and learn', and 'Staff at St John's are professional and caring.'

You have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The quality of teaching has improved and is particularly strong in upper key stage 2. As a result, pupils achieve standards above

national expectations by the end of key stage 2 and make very good progress, especially in reading and writing. Outcomes have improved in Reception, and at the end of key stage 1 in writing and mathematics. However, you recognise that there is still work to do, especially in key stage 1. Quite rightly you have prioritised this area of school for further improvement.

Pupils now apply mathematical skills more widely in other subjects. For example, by handling data, drawing graphs and calculating averages in science and topic work. Pupils have more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in problem-solving challenges.

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have been checking the progress that different groups of pupils make more rigorously and more regularly. Consequently, teachers know how well pupils are achieving. Leaders ensure that teachers use this information to provide the right support for pupils that need it. A new assessment system introduced in the autumn term has yet to be fully embedded. However, the new system helps staff to see more clearly the small steps in progress that some pupils are making.

Attendance has improved and is now above the national average for all pupils. Attendance has also improved for disadvantaged pupils and is broadly in line with the national figure for all pupils. You have implemented effective strategies to promote good attendance and tackle absence. You make your expectations clear to parents and promote good attendance and punctuality through your school newsletter. You take swift action to address poor attendance and are right to focus your attention equally on tackling the late arrival of some families to school.

Pupils respond well to the behaviour system you have implemented. You regularly monitor the frequency and type of behaviour incidents. You have introduced activities to engage pupils at break and lunchtimes and, as a result, the number of incidents have reduced. You support pupils effectively who need extra help to manage their own behaviour so that there are no disruptions to learning. One pupil said, 'I'm proud that everyone behaves well.' Pupils are polite and courteous and in lessons they focus on their learning. They work well by themselves and with other pupils. They demonstrate respect for one another and value their differences. One pupil said, 'We are all unique', and another added, 'In our own ways.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that staff and governors are regularly updated with regards to all aspects of safeguarding so that a strong culture of safeguarding is promoted. Your system for the recruitment of staff is thorough. You have effective induction procedures in place so that new staff receive safeguarding training promptly. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil and know what signs

they should look out for. You take concerns seriously and take swift action to ensure that pupils are safe. You are extra vigilant with vulnerable pupils.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum. They demonstrate a good understanding of e-safety. They know 'the rules' for keeping safe online and know who to go to if they are upset or need help.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, attainment in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 was well below the national average. In 2017, attainment in writing and mathematics improved, although it was still below the national average. You have made an especially good impact on current outcomes in writing, although you recognise there is still more to do. Work in books shows that in Year 2 the most able pupils can write simple, well-structured narrative with some interesting phrases, for example, 'peeked through the door'. They use a wide range of punctuation, mostly accurately. For example, speech marks and apostrophes. However, some pupils have not yet secured accurate sentence structure and basic punctuation. Teachers move them on too quickly before they have grasped these essential skills. Some pupils have developed fluent, legible handwriting and have gained their 'pen licence'. However, you acknowledge that the quality of handwriting and presentation is variable across classes.
- In key stage 1, you allocate more teaching time to mathematics and have purchased additional resources to help pupils in their learning. Pupils practise numbers, counting, and shape recognition daily. As a result, outcomes have improved, especially at the higher standard. Teachers now give pupils additional challenges. However, some pupils have not developed their mathematical understanding sufficiently to be able to apply their skills or explain their learning. You are right to maintain a focus on mathematics and have recently introduced some new methods of teaching but the impact of this is yet to be seen.
- Disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1 are supported well on a daily basis in reading. They receive additional support in class to secure basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers meet with disadvantaged pupils regularly to review progress and plan next steps. As a result, they make steady progress. Additional funding is used to promote good attendance for disadvantaged pupils, subsidise the breakfast club and provide access to educational visits.
- In phonics lessons, pupils are enthusiastic to learn. Pupils understand technical terms, such as split diagraphs, and are keen to share their knowledge. Staff model the sounds letters make well and take opportunities to reinforce learning. For example, in Year 1, when looking at the 'au' sound and the word 'August', pupils were asked to explain why it had a capital letter. Leaders take a more rigorous approach in monitoring the impact of teaching in phonics than in the past. Leaders check the progress of pupils and provide targeted, intensive, daily support for pupils who are

underachieving. They have provided training for teachers and support staff and, as a result, the quality of teaching in phonics has improved.

- In Reception, a significant number of children join the school at a low starting point. Almost two-thirds of the current Reception cohort joined with skills that were well below those typical for their age. Almost half of the year group did not attend the school nursery and some joined their Reception class with no pre-school experience. Some pupils speak English as an additional language and some have SEN and/or disabilities. Although the percentage of children reaching a good level of development is still below the national average, children make good progress and outcomes have improved.
- Children are given many opportunities to develop early writing skills. Boys, in particular, are encouraged to write by wearing a 'super mask'. Teachers support children effectively to form letters accurately and to write simple sentences using their phonic knowledge and correct punctuation. Staff ensure that children develop their language skills well. They repeat sentences so that children learn to speak in full sentences and pronounce words correctly. Teachers and support staff use effective questioning to check children's understanding and move learning forward.
- In Nursery and Reception children enjoy learning in a vibrant and well-organised learning environment. They are focused and engaged. For example, in Reception, children were 'chefs', mixing potions in the 'potion shop'. They were excited to share what they had made exclaiming, 'It smells like strawberry!' and 'It bubbles!' Children respond well to staff because routines and expectations are well established. They enjoy strong relationships. For example, in Nursery, children enjoyed using puppets to talk about their feelings with the teacher.
- The local authority has provided support for early years and signposted support for the quality of teaching in key stage 1. They acknowledge recent improvements in these areas but agree there is still work to do to further improve outcomes, especially at the end of key stage 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers further improve outcomes in writing for pupils in key stage 1 by ensuring that skills, knowledge and understanding are embedded securely before moving pupils on to the next stage in their learning and address misconceptions early so that they do not become embedded over time.
- teachers have consistently high expectations for the quality of handwriting and presentation in key stage 1.
- teachers, especially in key stage 1, continue to develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills to further improve outcomes in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Cameron
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, who is the key stage 1 leader and English lead, the leader for early years, the leader for mathematics, a newly qualified teacher and the home-school link worker. I also met with the school business manager, a representative of the local authority and two governors. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. I considered 10 free-text responses to Parent View, one email and 12 responses to Parent View.

I scrutinised a range of school documentation including the single central record, the school self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I also looked at records of attendance, behaviour and child protection. I visited every classroom with you and looked at pupils' work, particularly in key stage 1. I spoke to pupils informally about their learning and safety and observed their behaviour in breakfast club, on the playground, in the dining room and in lessons.