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Patrick Rayner
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rayner

Short inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 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 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 and is continuing to move the school forward strongly. Based on the evidence available during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Together with the staff team, you have built a harmonious learning community at St John's, where pupils are encouraged to reach their full potential, both academically and socially. The school has a warm, friendly atmosphere. Pupils behave well and respect each other and the adults who teach them. They enjoy school and attend regularly.

You have developed a strong leadership team at St John's. Accountability is clear and there are good lines of communication. Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. They said that staff are approachable and care passionately about their children. Parents spoken with during this inspection were keen to explain how staff often go above and beyond their expectations to support their children and provide opportunities for them to thrive. Parents also value highly the closely knit school community and the broad curriculum provided for children. One parent wrote, 'I particularly like the fact that the school gives importance to outdoor pursuits and music, as well as academic subjects, to encourage children to become rounded individuals.' Assemblies, lessons and faith festivals enable pupils to

learn about other cultures, religions and British values, such as tolerance and mutual respect.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to further improve the already good teaching at the school by ensuring that there was greater challenge for pupils in lessons. You have been successful in addressing this issue, and the improvements that have been made are reflected in the key stage 2 results in 2017. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level was in line with or above the national average in reading, in writing and in mathematics. The proportion judged to be working at the higher standard was well above the national average in reading and mathematics.

Despite the school's many strengths, you acknowledge that further improvements are required in some areas. For example, you recognise that more pupils could be achieving higher standards in writing by the end of key stage 2. The detailed plans you have developed, to address areas of relative weakness, demonstrate how well you know your school and your commitment to continuous improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at St John's, and the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are vigilant about pupils' welfare and know what to do if they have any concerns. The safeguarding governor maintains a good overview of safeguarding practice in the school. She works closely with the school and makes regular checks on a range of safeguarding issues, including staff recruitment and training.

You, and the deputy designated safeguarding lead work closely with outside agencies, where appropriate, to secure pupils' safety. You act quickly to address any concerns and ensure that the recording of all actions is comprehensive. However, we did discuss some refinement to the recording system, which would make it easier for you to check the impact of your actions.

Pupils are taught about different aspects of personal safety. For example, older pupils take part in a course to learn how to cycle safely on roads. Pupils also demonstrated a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. During a discussion with me, they recited the school's strategy for online safety, 'Zip it. Block it. Flag it'. They explained that this means do not disclose personal information online, block contact from anybody bullying or harassing you and flag up any problems to parents or teachers.

Pupils told me that behaviour is very good at the school and that if they have a problem staff will solve it 'straight away'. Almost every parent who responded to Parent View agreed that their children are well looked after and safe in school. The overwhelming majority of parents would recommend the school to others.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry I explored during this inspection was to see whether the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving and resulting in pupils making better progress. The evidence you provided from your comprehensive monitoring and evaluation, and the work I saw in pupils' books, shows that teaching is typically highly effective, and pupils make strong progress as a result, particularly in mathematics. An effective focus on developing pupils' reasoning skills has resulted in improvements across the school in pupils' ability to use and apply mathematics. This is reflected in pupils' impressive attainment in mathematics in 2017. An above-average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard at the end of key stage 1. By the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in mathematics, and those judged to be working at the higher level, was well above the national average.
- Improvements have also been made to the teaching of writing. Their impact can be seen in the above-average proportion of pupils who reached the expected level in writing and in the grammar, punctuation and spelling assessment at the end of Year 6. Pupils now have regular opportunities to write at length, and you are now focusing on ensuring that more pupils are able to demonstrate the qualities that indicate they are working at greater depth. There is evidence in pupils' books that good progress is being made in this area. However, you recognise that the quality of writing in the wider curriculum is often not as good as it could be. Opportunities to use subjects such as geography to develop pupils' writing are not fully exploited. Improvements are also needed to the quality of handwriting and presentation. Currently, this aspect of pupils' work does not reflect the excellent attitudes they demonstrate during lessons.
- The teaching of reading is a particular strength of the school. Children make good progress in developing their early reading skills in Reception class and in Year 1. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check, at the end of Year 1, has been above the national average for the past two years. Older pupils spoken with during this inspection read widely and often and demonstrate an excellent knowledge of children's authors. The school's success in developing pupils' reading is reflected in the test results at the end of key stage 2. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard and those judged to be working at the higher level has been above the national average for the past two years.
- My second line of enquiry related to how well pupils are achieving in the wider curriculum and how effectively these subjects are led. Leaders have developed a curriculum which is suitably broad and balanced and enriched with activities, such as residential visits and the opportunity to learn to play a range of musical instruments. A well-planned approach to 'topic' work ensures that pupils develop knowledge and expertise in subjects such as science, geography and history. However, the level of work set in these lessons in some classes is not consistently challenging enough to fully stretch the most able pupils. As a result, they do not make the progress of which they are capable in these subjects.
- Finally, I looked at the role of the governing body and how effective it is in supporting and challenging senior leaders. Governance is now a strength of the

school. Governors bring with them an excellent range of experience and expertise. Good systems are in place to help governors understand how well the school is performing. Governors also make regular visits to the school to see for themselves how well policies are put into practice and to gain an understanding of the effectiveness and impact of teaching, learning and assessment. Governors meet with every member of staff each term to discuss pupils' progress and attainment. Governors fully understand the school's strengths and those areas that can be improved still further. They maintain a good strategic overview of the school and have played a key role in the school's continued improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is more consistent, greater challenge for the most able pupils in science, geography and history
- better opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their writing skills in the wider curriculum
- teachers have higher expectations of pupils' presentation and handwriting skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the subject leader for mathematics, nine members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I also spoke with parents, staff and pupils. I visited all classrooms with you to see learning taking place. I looked at work in pupils' books and listened to some pupils read. I spoke with a group of Year 6 pupils about their experience of school and observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and playtimes. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, the school's development plan and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. I also took account of the 67 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.