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Mr Ben Caldicott
Acting Headteacher
St James' CofE Primary School
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Dear Mr Caldicott

Short inspection of St James' CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The previous headteacher left the school in August 2017. Since then you have undertaken the role of acting headteacher. You know the school because you have worked there for some time. You have used your knowledge to help you to sharpen the school's drive for improvement. The governors established a new senior leadership team comprising you, two acting assistant headteachers and the coordinator for provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This team has the total confidence of the staff and the wider school community. This period of change has been characterised by a strong sense of team work.

In recent years, pupils' outcomes have generally been in line with or above those seen nationally. Attainment in the younger years has been impressive. In both 2016 and 2017, the proportion of children who left Reception having attained a good level of development was above average. The proportion of pupils who have met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has also been high, and in 2017 all pupils met the standard.

Pupils' progress in key stage 2 has been broadly average. However, in 2017 pupils left Year 6 having made progress in mathematics which was significantly below that seen nationally. In English and mathematics, the small number of disadvantaged pupils have made progress in line with that of their peers, and inspection evidence showed that this continues to be the case. You are well aware that there has

sometimes been a gap between the achievement of boys and girls in one or more aspects of the curriculum and have taken steps to address this.

You emphasise that you and all the staff are also learners. You prioritise staff training and show an openness to good ideas from outside the school. Other staff, such as subject leaders, are eager to play their part in the further improvement of the school. Parents told me that you respond well to any concerns that they raise. Pupils are aware of how they can contribute, through the school council, to the improvement of the school. During the inspection, senior leaders skilfully identified the strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

Your clear direction for the school, your measured approach and your willingness to listen have contributed to a very strong sense of community in St James' CofE Primary School. There is a real warmth to the school, and a total commitment to inclusion and willingness to tackle any signs of discrimination. You use some of the pupil premium funding, for example, to make absolutely sure that pupils' particular circumstances are no barrier to participation in trips or after-school clubs. You and the governors live by the school's Christian values and understand well that these include respect for those of different cultures and beliefs. All pupils have the opportunity to visit places where those of other faiths worship.

The school's buddy scheme provides a striking example of the school's culture. Year 6 pupils help younger children to settle into the Reception class. Staff take photographs of the older pupil with them when they visit children's homes so that the children will recognise their buddies on their first day. Staff, pupils and parents all told me how effective the scheme was, not only in helping the younger children but also in developing the skills of the pupils in Year 6 and their ability to understand other children's feelings.

Teachers are well aware of the differing starting points of pupils in their classes and set work accordingly. Pupils told me that work is suitably challenging, and that they enjoy this. Good questioning helps to deepen pupils' understanding and enables teachers to judge how well pupils are learning. Lessons proceed at a good pace. During the inspection, pupils of all ages were willing and able to explain their ideas orally, at length.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff know pupils very well. They use that knowledge to ensure that pupils are safe. Leaders work effectively with parents and other agencies to look after those pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. They are persistent, and tailor their support sensitively and effectively to the needs and circumstances of individual pupils.

The school's policies and procedures comply with the most recent legislation. You update the staff regularly on safeguarding matters. You and your governors are aware of local risks, such as those posed by the River Wye, and have acted accordingly.

Pupils told me they feel very safe in school, and that they would talk to an adult about any issue that concerned them. They are able to recall in detail the advice that they have received, for example about how to keep themselves safe online. Parents and staff also believe that the school is highly effective in keeping pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- School leaders have dealt successfully with those areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the last inspection. Teachers follow the school's clear policy for the development of pupils' handwriting and make sure that pupils practise these skills every day. The opportunity to gain a 'pen licence' provides pupils with a strong motivation to meet the school's high expectations for presentation.
- You and your colleagues have made sure that different subjects include opportunities for pupils to use and apply their skills in mathematics. Inspection evidence shows that pupils commonly use their skills in numeracy to perform calculations, take measurements and draw graphs in subjects such as geography and science.
- Governors acted swiftly and effectively to support those leaders who were new to their posts in September 2017. They arranged a mentor to support you and the other inexperienced leaders. They have also taken practical steps to contribute to the leadership of the school, such as meeting with parents of pupils whose attendance has become a cause for concern. Governors with particular expertise, such as financial knowledge, have provided prompt and effective advice.
- You, other leaders and governors have a thorough understanding of the school's priorities and have identified appropriate actions to address the school's relative weaknesses. For example, you have improved the contribution that homework makes to pupils' learning. You have developed the use of circle time to deepen pupils' emotional awareness.
- Most importantly, leaders have tackled effectively the weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics that led to the disappointing outcomes for Year 6 pupils in 2017. You concluded that key stage 2 pupils required a deeper understanding of mathematical ideas. Teachers have therefore changed their approach radically, placing a consistent emphasis on problem-solving and mathematical reasoning. The quality of teaching in mathematics at key stage 2 is now strong. Pupils are able to explain their thinking both orally and in writing. They told me that they enjoy the greater challenge that mathematics lessons now bring.
- You are entirely committed to providing a broad and stimulating curriculum. You have taken a creative approach, for example devoting whole days to particular subjects or topics to secure pupils' engagement. Pupils who spoke with me enjoyed their lessons, and the range of extra-curricular opportunities. Work in pupils' books showed me that pupils learn the key skills associated with each subject, in addition to the knowledge that goes with each topic. Teachers record pupils' attainment in foundation subjects, so that in subsequent years work can

be securely based on what pupils already know and understand.

- Leaders in foundation subjects are suitably knowledgeable about their area of the curriculum. They have a well-rounded understanding of how to support teachers in teaching a particular topic. They check on the quality of pupils' work in books, and can point to improvements that their guidance has made to the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, leaders are not yet monitoring the quality of teaching in their subjects rigorously enough. Their monitoring and support have not yet led to a consistently high level of expectation in foundation subjects.
- Some of the school's plans, such as the one that addresses standards in mathematics, show very clearly what leaders are trying to achieve, and the progress that they have made. However, the school's development plan does not include sufficiently precise measures by which governors and others can judge whether the school is on track at any particular time to meet its objectives. The school's self-evaluation is sometimes overgenerous and too general because it is not based firmly on detailed evidence. It does not form a good basis for improvement planning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans provide all stakeholders, and in particular governors, with the means to make sharp and accurate judgements on the school's progress
- leaders of foundation subjects check more effectively on the work of their colleagues, so that expectations are as high in foundation subjects as they are in English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Spoor
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, subject leaders and governors. I also held informal conversations with other members of staff. I observed the teaching of mathematics and foundation subjects jointly with senior leaders. I met with a group of pupils to gather their views and spoke informally to many more. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I observed pupils'

behaviour at social times and when pupils moved around the school.

I took account of 65 recent responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and those made using the free-text service. I also considered eight responses to the survey for staff, and 10 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

I scrutinised a wide range of documents both electronically and on paper, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and plans for improvement; external monitoring reports; policies; and records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I looked in detail at records which show how the school keeps pupils safe.