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Mrs Sue Blackburn
Executive Headteacher
St Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Blackburn

Short inspection of St Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 April 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the school has entered into an informal collaboration with two local primary schools, both of which you are the executive headteacher of, and members of your leadership team now work across all three schools. Supported by your school leaders and a skilled governing body, you have successfully managed a period of change. You have invested in your workforce and staff feel supported by your leadership as a result.

The Christian ethos of the school underpins its values, which are evident across the school. Standards of behaviour are exemplary and relationships between adults and pupils are based on mutual respect. These very strong relationships ensure that pupils receive the support they need and are kept safe.

Leaders have established an atmosphere which is exceptionally calm and welcoming. Pupils are happy, confident and eager to learn; they enjoy coming to school. The staff are proud to work at the school and they challenge all pupils to do better by having consistently high expectations.

The overwhelming majority of pupils, parents and carers are proud to be members of the school community. One parent commented: 'The school feels like a big family; everyone is working hard and giving their best. I could not ask for more.' This was typical of the views of parents who submitted free-text comments during the inspection.

Leaders have focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning over time to ensure that all pupils make strong progress. Since you started as executive headteacher, you have increased the rigour and level of monitoring. You and the staff are clearer about which groups and areas to focus on. An example of this is the regular scrutiny of pupils' books, particularly in Years 2 and 3, to ensure that progress is being maintained at similar rapid rates across the whole school.

Since the last inspection, the leadership team has focused on improving the level of challenge in lessons. Teachers routinely use questions well so that pupils think deeply and give explanations for their answers. Leaders meticulously track the progress of different groups of pupils. This helps you to identify which pupils need to make even more progress. However, in this smaller-than-average-size primary school I recognise that results can vary considerably because of the small numbers taking the tests.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team at St Lawrence has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a high level of trust and communication between staff and parents, who feel confident that their children are safe.

Leaders and governors monitor safeguarding concerns carefully. They make sure all incidents are logged and followed up meticulously. Training is arranged for staff that ensures all have the necessary skills to identify issues early. The school helps families with their wider needs, including advice on who they should approach for support.

The pupils I spoke with told me that they can talk to members of staff if they are worried. They spoke confidently about how the school has taught them to stay safe when working online. Pupils referred to specific lessons they can remember where they were taught the many advantages and sometimes disadvantages of using the internet.

Inspection findings

- At our initial meeting, we discussed the priorities for the school, its direction and the areas that you have identified for improvement. We agreed on a number of key lines of enquiry.
- The first line of enquiry was to consider the accuracy of the school's systems for tracking pupils' academic progress, including the disadvantaged, and how this information is used to address any underperformance.

- You make sure that teachers have the information and training they need to accurately assess pupils' progress. You stipulate that teachers complete frequent, regular and thorough reviews of pupils' progress and use this information to inform their planning. As a result, pupils who are falling behind are identified without delay and given the help they need to catch up. You know which interventions work best and spend pupil premium funding wisely to secure effective support for the small number of disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils regularly attain above the national standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2017, progress at the end of key stage 2 was average in reading and writing. From discussions with pupils and staff, and from scrutinising work, it is evident that current pupils are making strong progress.
- The second line of enquiry was to look at mathematics teaching in the school. Year 6 pupils in 2017 achieved outcomes that were average in mathematics, following well-above-average outcomes the previous year. Leaders understand the reasons for this decline, including the impact of small numbers and occasional minor inconsistencies of teaching in Years 2 and 3. The school's self-evaluation includes this as an area for focus. Our learning walks, looking particularly at mathematics, indicated that the overwhelming majority of pupils across the school are making strong progress.
- In early years, for the past three years, children have achieved a good level of development well above the national average. The next key line of enquiry was to explore how well the strong outcomes are being sustained. A scrutiny of work and classroom observation in early years demonstrates that these high rates of development are continuing. The school works closely with parents and outside agencies to ensure that children's attitudes remain very positive from the start of their time at St Lawrence.
- Through lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, it is evident that throughout the school the very small number of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are fully included. The school gives an exceptional level of care to individual pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. As a result, this group is making equally rapid progress and the school is ambitious for them to continue to make even better progress.
- Your three schools have invested time and finances and are benefiting from the informal collaboration. The shared training and expertise gives the strength of a larger school while maintaining a small, village school feel.
- Teachers of similar-aged pupils work together to improve teaching and learning. Teachers are able to collaborate with colleagues, moderate pupils' work and share ideas. Your investment in middle leaders who work across the schools has significantly raised the profile of mathematics and English. Because of a recent promotion of a member of staff to another school, you are keen to develop further this aspect to school improvement when appointing new members of staff in the future.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the work already done to ensure consistency of teaching that matches the very best already taking place in the school
- new staff employed at the school are quickly inducted into the very high standards of provision, ensuring that pupils continue to make rapid progress.

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 Telford and Wrekin. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steven Cartlidge
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you and other leaders. We visited classes together to observe pupils' learning and scrutinised their work. I talked to pupils in lessons and in a meeting, when I listened to their views of the school. I listened to some pupils read. A wide range of documentary evidence was scrutinised, including information about pupils' performance, the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and safeguarding documentation. I met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I also spoke to your school evaluation partner. I looked at your records for teaching, learning and assessment and documents for the governing body. I took account of 29 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including 16 free-text comments. I also considered the seven responses to the staff questionnaire distributed as part of the inspection.