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Miss Lydia Hunt
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Dear Miss Hunt

Short inspection of St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

This is a small primary school with one class in each year group from Reception to Year 6. The school is calm and well organised. Pupils behave well and are positive about their learning. They are polite, friendly and confident to talk about their work. Teachers and other staff are proud to work at the school. There is a positive and inclusive ethos. Pupils' attendance is above average. They enjoy school.

Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes in staffing and, currently, some staff and governors are temporary or new to their roles. This has presented some challenges in maintaining the quality of teaching, learning and leadership.

You are currently leading on several important areas of the school's work, including safeguarding, assessment, mathematics and provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. While this is not unusual for a small primary school, it has undermined your capacity to maintain the good standard of education in some areas.

Most parents and carers are supportive of the school and the work that you do.

Around 80% of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said they would recommend the school. Their written comments showed that a small group of parents are critical of the school's work to identify and support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

As at the time of the previous inspection, pupils make slower progress in mathematics than in reading and writing and this remains an area of improvement for the school.

You were concerned that teacher assessment in the early years was previously not accurate. You have worked with the early years leader to ensure that assessment information is more reliable now.

The wider curriculum is developing well. For example, pupils across the school are learning to speak French. They enjoy this subject and are developing their knowledge and use of the language well. Effective and lively teaching engages pupils in a range of activities to grow their vocabulary and to extend this into accurate spoken and written sentences. Varied and numerous extra-curricular activities enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment of school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The systems and procedures to keep pupils safe are secure. All staff receive regular training to help them identify signs of concern. They report any concerns they have appropriately and in a timely way. You take appropriate action, including working with outside agencies, to ensure that you do all that you can to keep pupils safe. Safeguarding records are thorough and well organised. The necessary pre-employment checks on staff are completed and recorded diligently.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. They understand the dangers in having unknown 'friends' online. They understand what constitutes bullying. They say that it rarely happens at the school and they believe that staff would deal with it appropriately.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year was below average for the previous two years. Although outcomes improved in 2017, they are still too low.
- The teaching of reading in the early years does not help children make good progress in learning and applying their phonics knowledge. Our observations confirmed that they are not confident in this aspect of their learning. This means that children do not get off to the best start in learning to read and write. Although some children are doing very well, others are hampered by teaching that is not precise or accurate enough.
- We looked further at the teaching and learning of reading into key stage 1. Here, too, pupils do not make the progress they are capable of because teaching is not precise enough. I looked closely at the books pupils read and found that they are

not well chosen to support their phonics knowledge. Those pupils who did not acquire the necessary skills in the early years are not catching up quickly. They frequently guess or rely on clues in pictures to read unfamiliar words. This means that they cannot read their books with the fluency required to understand the simple stories and texts.

- At the end of key stage 1, more effective teaching helps pupils to make better progress so their attainment in reading and writing is broadly average. However, from their starting points, this does not represent good progress.
- A team of volunteers supports the school by hearing children read individually and in groups. This helps to add to pupils' enjoyment of reading. However, some volunteers have not been trained sufficiently to best support pupils' learning.
- Over time, pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics have lagged behind those in other subjects. You have identified this as an area for improvement. Your actions to improve pupils' achievement have not been wholly successful. The teaching and learning in mathematics are not consistently effective across year groups.
- Together, we looked closely at the work in pupils' books and the differences were stark. In some year groups, including in Year 2 and Year 5, pupils make good progress. Their work shows that teaching builds step by step on prior learning. Pupils organise their work well and take pride in it. In some other year groups, this is not the case. Pupils are not working at the standard you expect. Their progress slows and not enough of them are challenged to attain the higher standard.
- You and the staff have made good progress in improving aspects of the school's work. Support for disadvantaged pupils is much more targeted and impactful. A dedicated teacher works with individuals and groups of disadvantaged pupils. You have identified their barriers to attainment and ensured that they have additional support to improve their achievement. Pupils' work and your assessment information indicate that this small number of pupils are making better progress now than previously.
- Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate. In our discussions, you were highly evaluative and honest. Your improvement plans usually focus on the most important priorities. You recognise the challenges the school faces and relish the opportunity to evidence the impact of the improvements you plan at the school's next inspection.
- Governors are keen to support the school. However, they lack the necessary knowledge to hold you and other leaders to account for pupils' achievement. When I met with representatives of the governing body, they recognised that this is the case.
- The school's improvement partner has worked with you to sharpen your self-evaluation summary and improvement-plan documents. She has reviewed parts of the school's provision. The written summary of this review does not support governors in their role. It is overly positive and does not highlight the areas of relative weakness sufficiently clearly. Nevertheless, you are clear about what needs to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- all staff in the early years and Year 1 have the necessary training and support to teach phonics, early reading and writing consistently well
- all teachers have the necessary training and support to teach mathematics consistently well
- the governing body seeks support to ensure that it has the necessary knowledge and understanding to hold the school to account, particularly for the achievement of all groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection and to agree the key lines of enquiry for this inspection. I spoke informally to staff and pupils, and held a series of meetings with a group of pupils, the leader for the early years and reading, four governors and your school improvement partner.

I reviewed a wide range of information provided, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and progress reviews. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding, staff recruitment and child protection procedures. We visited lessons and looked at pupils' work in most classes across the school. I also looked at 42 responses to Parent View, 10 staff survey returns and 38 pupil survey responses.