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Mrs Kathryn Benford
Headteacher
St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior and Infant School
Fieldhead
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Dear Mrs Benford

Short inspection of St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You know your school very well and you are ably supported by your assistant headteacher and other senior leaders. Together, you have created a school which is firmly rooted in its Christian values of love, honesty, forgiveness, respect and friendship. These values have developed a strong bond between the school and the local community, with joint partnerships such as the community garden and the 'Big Sew Day', where the community came together to create a sewing masterpiece in the school hall.

Governors know the school well and bring a wide range of skills to their role. They are not afraid to challenge you to make sure that pupils achieve the highest standards. Governors are proud that the school nurtures well-rounded and aspirational pupils.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to strengthen the role of middle leaders so that they could contribute more effectively to school improvement. You have developed a strong team of leaders, including a recently appointed early years leader, who know the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your current improvement plans are ambitious. They rightly focus on raising standards even further, especially for the most able pupils. You and the governors recognise that

the school's plans for improvement need further refining to make the criteria for success more precise and measurable.

Leaders were also asked to improve pupils' achievement in writing. Staff developed a detailed action plan to improve writing, which focused upon refining assessment information so that it is more useful and highlights next steps. However, the improvements have taken time to become embedded, and writing outcomes in 2016 and 2017 did not show the impact of this work. Current assessment information demonstrates that outcomes in writing are improving but leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to increase the proportions of pupils achieving the expected and higher standards across the school.

Pupils, parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent said, 'It is a small school, family-orientated and great with communication.' Pupils and parents alike value the way in which you are open to suggestions for improvement, such as widening the paths around the school and creating better playground areas. Parents say that you have created a nurturing school and that the school instils good values for all children. Pupils are well behaved and care about the school. Year 6 pupils are keen to share their role of being a befriender, supporting younger pupils on the playground and helping them resolve any issues they may have.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has created a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders are meticulous in their record-keeping and procedures. Staff record any vulnerability concerns centrally. Leaders then use this information to seek advice and signpost to a range of agencies. Concerns are swiftly actioned and leaders are persistent in their follow-up to ensure that information sharing is strong.

Pupils' well-being is paramount and their attendance levels are high. Recently, all staff in school have undergone thorough training to ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure. All staff and governors have received and read up-to-date documentation about safeguarding and child protection so that they can protect pupils from harm. Safeguarding leaders cascade their training to other staff and ensure that external providers using the school site have the necessary checks in place.

Inspection findings

- In recent years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception has been declining and, in 2017, was broadly average. Few children have exceeded this level. Therefore, I wanted to check what leaders are doing to reverse this decline and to check whether children in the early years, especially the most able, are making good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders are already taking effective action to bring about improvement and, in 2018, provisional early years outcomes show an improved picture. Children in the early years are well taught overall. Routines are well established, helping children

to develop their independence. Adults use, and model, precise language when talking to children, such as the sounds that letters make. This helps children to decode and blend words and sounds. As a result, children become confident and resilient in tackling new, unfamiliar words. Most children are making good progress from their starting points.

- You acknowledge that, in the past, learning in the early years did not focus well enough on those children who have the potential to exceed the expected levels of development. You have taken action to address this. Your new early years leader ensures that these children are now identified swiftly. She has already established plans to make sure that provision for the most able children, both indoors and outside, is well adapted to support and challenge them in their learning. She is making sure that the early assessments of what children already know and can do are being used well to identify children's next steps in learning and to provide challenging activities for all, especially the most able. You know that this now needs embedding into day-to-day practice so that the proportion of children that exceed the expected level of development increases.
- I also wanted to check what leaders are doing to make sure that most-able pupils achieve well in other key stages. This is because, over time, a below-average proportion of pupils have reached the higher standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2. You have also, correctly, identified this as a priority for improvement and are taking appropriate actions to address it.
- Targeted meetings to review assessments of pupils' skills and knowledge ensure that the most able pupils are identified more quickly. Teachers are being held more to account for making sure that the tasks they set are sufficiently challenging. Recent school information indicates that the most able pupils are now making better progress, especially in key stage 2. Even so, some pupils told me that they feel that they could be moved on to more challenging tasks more quickly. I agree. There is more to do to ensure that, in all key stages, the most able pupils are effectively challenged to make consistently good progress.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics and reading. An above-average proportion of pupils reach the expected standards by the end of Year 6. In mathematics, new opportunities for learning, for example through physical education and outdoor activities, have brought a renewed positivity to pupils. Pupils are keen to win the 'Motty' reward each week and therefore work well together to improve their mathematical and teamwork skills. In reading, pupils make good progress. They read with fluency and confidence. Pupils apply their phonics knowledge when encountering new, unfamiliar words.
- Pupils have not achieved as well in writing as they have in reading and mathematics. By the end of Year 6 in 2016 and 2017, attainment in writing has been below average. Too few pupils reach the expected or higher standards in writing. On the inspection, therefore, I wanted to check what leaders are doing to improve pupils' achievement in writing.
- Your English subject leader has identified and implemented the correct actions to improve pupils' achievement in writing across the school. These have taken some time to become embedded, but leaders' actions are now starting to pay off.

Unvalidated 2018 data, along with current school assessment information, shows a marked improvement in standards in writing at the end of both key stages 1 and 2. To achieve this, you have developed a curriculum that promotes a genuine love of writing. Pupils thoroughly enjoy writing. They say that teachers help them to know how to improve their written work. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to use and apply their writing skills across a range of curriculum subjects and in meaningful contexts. This is evident, for example, in recent work by Year 6 following a residential visit to Castleton. Even so, leaders acknowledge that there is scope to improve pupils' writing even further. Work is needed, for example, to bring about a better balance between pupils learning the grammatical aspects of writing and applying them in their independent writing.

- Even though you have correctly identified the school's priorities for improvement and are taking appropriate actions to address them, your improvement plans do not set out the precise criteria by which you intend to measure the success of your actions, such as on improving outcomes for the most able pupils. Refining these plans is also an important next step so that you can hold staff to account more effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in all key stages, the most able pupils are consistently challenged in order to increase the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards
- improvements in pupils' writing are further embedded, including making sure that pupils use and apply their grammatical skills more fully in their independent writing
- the criteria for success set out in school improvement plans are sharp enough so that leaders can measure the impact of their actions and hold staff to account more effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Clennan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I observed teaching and learning and scrutinised examples of pupils' work, alongside both you and your assistant headteacher. I met with you and senior leaders. I met with three governors and spoke to a representative of the local authority. I spoke with 10 pupils in a discussion group and with pupils informally in lessons and around the school. I also listened to several pupils read.

I evaluated the 42 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and met with a group of parents. I also took account of the seven responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I reviewed a range of school documents. These included the school's self-evaluation, the school's development plans and safeguarding documentation. I also considered information posted on the school's website.