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Mr Jason Eveleigh
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Eveleigh

Short inspection of St James Church School

Following my visit to the school on 4 December 2018 with Paula Marsh, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since the last inspection, the school has experienced significant changes. Pupil numbers have risen significantly and pupil mobility in and out of the school has also increased. You joined as headteacher in 2016 and have made several new appointments to the teaching staff. You have also recently restructured the leadership team and redesigned their roles and responsibilities.

A strength of the leadership of the school is your accurate self-evaluation and improvement planning. Leaders, including the trust, are honest and reflective about the challenges that exist and have well-designed plans to ensure that pupils achieve well. You demonstrate high expectations for all pupils and are not afraid to challenge practice as you continue to make improvements.

A key focus of your work is to continue to improve outcomes for pupils to ensure that more pupils, no matter their learning barriers, make better progress and therefore catch up with their peers. Last year saw a particularly high number of pupils join the school during the year. Pupils' books show that in Year 6 specific targeted teaching successfully addressed gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. This ensured that some pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, made rapid progress from their starting points. You are rolling out this approach to other year groups this year to ensure that more pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, make faster progress in all year groups.

At the previous inspection, an area for improvement was to ensure that pupils are sufficiently challenged in their learning. The central part of your plan to continue to improve the school is to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and that expectations are high for pupils in all year groups. Staff, including teaching assistants, say that they receive strong support and feedback from leaders and that this, alongside specific professional development guidance, helps them to improve their work and provide sufficient challenge for pupils.

Your strategy for improving the quality of teaching includes staff being able to learn from one another. For example, staff observe and discuss parts of lessons and share good practice in how to support and challenge pupils. As a result, staff morale is high, there is a shared sense of purpose and expectations continue to rise. All staff who expressed a view said that the school has improved since the previous inspection. Parents were also overwhelmingly positive in their responses, with a typical comment being, 'The school is well run, and my child is happy.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Recruitment procedures are well organised and regularly checked by leaders, including governors. The designated lead for safeguarding ensures that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training and that they have updates on any new guidance. Leaders also check that staff understand key messages about keeping children safe. Concerns about pupils' safety are followed up quickly and relentlessly. Parents speak positively about the advice they receive from the school and say it helps them to get the support they need from other agencies.

Following some concerns about behaviour at lunchtime, leaders improved the range of activities available so that more pupils could take part in physical activities under the supervision of sports coaches. This has reduced the number of behaviour incidents, although a few pupils who responded to an online survey said that behaviour could improve further.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we explored some specific areas, including how effectively children, particularly disadvantaged children, develop early reading skills. In the Nursery classes, children practise hearing and saying sounds through their learning activities, both indoors and outside, and most make strong progress. By the end of the Reception Year, more children have reached the standards expected of them than in previous years.
- We also looked at writing in key stage 1, particularly for boys. Pupils' books show inconsistencies in how well activities match pupils' learning needs in writing. The new phase leaders for early years and key stage 1 have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching. They have organised specific training for staff to improve phonics teaching and the teaching of writing in key stage 1. Rigorous systems are in place to check that pupils make the

progress they should.

- We explored how leaders ensure that there is a strong culture of reading. You have introduced new resources and approaches to help motivate pupils to read and to enjoy their reading. In each classroom, there are good-quality books for pupils to choose to read. There is also a large supply of different books, which pupils can read online at school, or at home. An element of competition excites many pupils who enjoy the word counts and speak excitedly about the 'word millionaires' in Year 6.
- Teachers actively encourage pupils to read whenever they can, throughout the day, during lessons and beyond. For example, during playtimes, pupils often choose to take their books out to read. Authors come into school to inspire and motivate pupils to read their books and classes explore books by different authors. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their reading and particularly enjoy the daily sharing of a story. For example, Year 6 pupils spoke with fondness about the story book, 'The goldfish boy'. Pupils enjoy a structured programme of follow-up comprehension questions and they say it helps them to understand their reading.
- We looked at whether disadvantaged pupils, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), read widely. The proportion of pupils identified with SEND is higher than the national average. Many of these pupils are also disadvantaged. The leadership team identified that outcomes need to improve and have introduced a sharper focus on checking the progress of pupils in these groups. All pupils now have 'passports' which outline their learning barriers and describe how they learn best. Leaders use reading assessments alongside observations in reading lessons to identify those who fall behind and to organise additional help, such as specific support programmes and individual reading sessions.
- From an analysis of reading assessments, leaders recognise that many pupils have weak knowledge of vocabulary. Specific activities to enrich pupils' experiences, and therefore to introduce a wider vocabulary, take place throughout the year. For example, pupils took part in a recent choir event, which pupils and parents attended well.
- Times are set aside each day for teachers to give extra support to pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. This may be to go over learning again, or to introduce new vocabulary or concepts ready for lessons that are about to take place. Assessment information and analysis by leaders show that these strategies are helping disadvantaged pupils to make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly in some year groups.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve so that more pupils in all year groups achieve at least as well as their peers
- the quality of teaching of writing in key stage 1 is consistently good.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with senior leaders and subject leaders throughout the day and visited lessons across the school with leaders. A sample of pupils' books was scrutinised. An inspector met with four governors. There was also a meeting with the regional director of learning and achievement from The Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust.

A range of school documents was looked at, including the school's self-evaluation document and improvement plans, as well as assessment information about pupils' progress. Other documents including the single central record and those relating to safeguarding and behaviour were scrutinised.

Parents' views were gathered at the start of the day, and through a meeting during the inspection. The 83 views and free-texts on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The 55 responses from staff and the 189 responses from pupils to online surveys were also considered.