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Mr Darren Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Short inspection of Heswall St Peter's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in 2018, you have led a welcoming and happy learning community. Within a caring Christian ethos, pupils are nurtured and encouraged to thrive. They develop as confident, resilient and successful learners who are keen to contribute to the school and wider community. Pupils learn to live out the school's values of pride, effort, teamwork, empathy, respect and spirituality.

You and your staff provide a wide range of interesting experiences for pupils to develop their learning and confidence, including trips to local museums. The school choir sings very regularly, for example singing for the local community and performing with the local symphony orchestra. Pupils develop their skills in different sports, including basketball and football. They enjoy taking part in many inter-school events and competitions. Annual residential trips in Years 2, 4 and 6 help to build pupils' confidence and resilience. Pupils leave Year 6 very well prepared for their next stage of education.

Leaders and staff place a strong emphasis on staff development. Your enthusiastic staff work collaboratively within school and with other professionals to share good practice and develop their expertise. More-experienced leaders nurture new subject leaders to ensure that their actions are further improving teaching, including in writing at key stage 1.

Your proactive and very skilled governors know the school very well. They share your vision to provide an engaging curriculum, firmly rooted in the school's Christian values. Governors visit the school regularly and are fully involved in evaluating school improvements. They are keen for pupils' progress to improve still further, including that of the most able pupils in mathematics. Governors have a wide range of skills, which they keep up to date through regular training. They provide the right balance of challenge and support for leaders. Governors keep a careful check on the spending of funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to ensure that it is having the impact that it should.

Pupils are very proud of their school and enjoy their learning. In class, pupils are enthusiastic and well behaved. They listen attentively to adults and work well with each other. Little learning time is lost and pupils are very keen to do their best. The school curriculum is carefully planned to develop pupils as caring and thoughtful citizens. Staff teach pupils to respect and value differences, including different cultures and religions. The pupils with whom I spoke were emphatic that all are treated equally and differences are celebrated. Through close links with schools in Uganda, pupils develop their knowledge of different countries and continents. Staff provide pupils with a wide variety of leadership opportunities, including Year 6 buddies, who care for younger children.

The majority of parents and carers share pupils' extremely positive view of the school. A typical comment on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, praised the school's curriculum: 'The strong Christian ethos shapes a curriculum which nurtures and encourages all children to strive for their best.' Parents were keen to praise the support and individual attention that their children receive, including parents of children with SEND. Parents of children in the early years value how well their children settle into school because of the care and attention given by staff.

A small number of parents raised concerns about the impact of the turbulence in staffing on pupils' progress in key stage 1 last year. During the inspection, I found that leaders have taken appropriate steps to ensure that any pupils with gaps in their learning receive additional support to help them catch up. The proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard and greater depth in reading and mathematics in 2018 were above the national averages. However, Year 2 pupils' attainment in writing fell to below national averages in 2018. During the inspection, I found that current pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that work is matched to pupils' abilities, including middle-ability pupils. I found that you have an accurate view of each pupil's learning. This is because staff make regular and accurate checks on pupils' progress and attainment. Teachers use this information to plan activities which match pupils' needs. Support staff work closely with teachers to provide a wide range of additional support, including in phonics, reading and mathematics, if pupils have gaps in their learning.

The checks that leaders make on the quality of teaching are regular and precise. Leaders carry out learning walks, check pupils' workbooks and interview pupils to check that teaching is good across the school. You use the information from these monitoring activities to plan training and support for staff. For example, the phonics leader has worked with staff to ensure that the activities planned in phonics match pupils' abilities.

Leaders were also asked at the previous inspection to ensure that ratios of supervision are sufficient at playtimes. I found that pupils are very well supervised at playtimes, with high adult-to-pupil ratios. Pupils say that they feel very safe. Pupil play leaders provide other pupils with a range of activities at playtimes, including hockey and skipping. The pupils with whom I spoke said that they enjoy playtimes, and everyone plays well together. They report that incidents of misbehaviour are rare and are quickly dealt with by staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders place a high priority on keeping pupils safe and have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough, fit for purpose and of high quality. All appropriate checks are undertaken on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. You provide visitors to the school with useful safeguarding information, including how to report any concerns. Leaders arrange regular safeguarding training for all staff. Safeguarding information is displayed around school. As a result, staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding. This keeps them alert to risks and attentive to procedures.

You have planned a curriculum with opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe in the wider community. Pupils told me that they learn about fire safety, road safety and how to cycle safely on roads. Pupils are confident about how to keep themselves safe online. The pupils with whom I spoke reported that they feel safe and secure in school. They know that they should speak to a trusted adult if they feel worried. Pupils are very confident that adults will listen to any concerns that they have.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to check how regularly pupils attend school. Pupils enjoy school and value their education. Most attend very regularly and whole-school attendance is above the national average. Staff check pupils' attendance and follow up absences with parents. Leaders strongly discourage term-time holidays due to their adverse impact on pupils' learning. However, a small number of pupils are persistently absent and this number has risen over time.
- For my second key line of enquiry, I considered the effectiveness of phonics teaching. This was because the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check fell to below the national average

in 2018. I found that leaders provide training for staff in phonics, including for teachers new to the school. Leaders check phonics teaching very regularly to check that pupils are making good progress. Their checks on learning show that the majority of pupils learn well. Leaders plan additional support for pupils when needed. Staff and adult volunteers listen to pupils read on a very regular basis. Leaders ensure that reading books match pupils' abilities. This means that pupils develop confidence and fluency when reading. They use their phonics knowledge when reading unfamiliar words and routinely practise their phonics skills in their writing. Some of the changes that you have made are recent and still embedding. Leaders are monitoring phonics teaching closely to ensure that changes continue to improve standards in phonics.

- My third key line of enquiry was to check how well pupils develop their writing skills in key stage 1. This was because in 2018 Year 2 pupils' attainment was lower than in mathematics and reading. I found that, across key stage 1, there is a consistent and effective approach to teaching writing. Pupils read engaging texts to develop their vocabulary and their enthusiasm to write. Pupils' workbooks show that they write at length and for a range of different purposes and in different subjects. Pupils apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills with accuracy. Pupils choose interesting vocabulary to make their writing more interesting to read. They edit and improve their own and other pupils' writing with confidence. During the inspection, pupils in Year 2 were writing information texts about the Arctic. They wrote with precision and care. Leaders' regular checks on pupils' progress confirm that pupils make good progress in their writing in key stage 1.
- Leaders have recently introduced steps to improve handwriting across the school. In key stage 1, the school's handwriting policy is still embedding. There is inconsistency in pupils' style and some pupils' handwriting is difficult to read and not well formed. Pupils leave the school with well-formed and neat, joined handwriting, however.
- For my final key line of enquiry, I considered the effectiveness of mathematics teaching in key stage 2. In recent years, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics has been above the national average. However, in 2018 pupils' progress in mathematics at the end of Year 6 was below average. Since the previous inspection, leaders have changed the approach to teaching mathematics. A consistent approach is in place. Through working with other professionals, staff have developed their confidence and effectiveness in mathematics teaching. Staff plan frequent opportunities for pupils to practise their fluency in number, including written calculations and understanding of place value. In lessons, staff use questioning very skilfully to develop pupils' reasoning skills. As a result, pupils are confident in explaining their mathematical thinking. Pupils enjoy mathematics and are confident when problem-solving. Leaders are keeping a careful check on teaching and learning to ensure that the changes they have made continue to improve progress in mathematics, including for the most able pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take effective actions to improve the attendance of pupils with persistent absence
- they embed recent improvements to phonics teaching, so that a greater proportion of pupils reach the expected standard in Year 1
- they continue to improve handwriting in key stage 1, so that more pupils write neatly and with a fluent style.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteachers and the subject leaders for English, phonics and mathematics. I took account of 32 staff responses to Ofsted's online survey. I met with six governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with eight pupils and spoke informally with other pupils during lessons. I also considered two responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils. I visited classes with you, where I observed teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work.

I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I took account of 109 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including free-text responses. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan and evaluations of teaching and learning. I checked the analysis of attendance. I also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe and safeguarding checks. I undertook a review of the school's website.