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Mrs Rebecca Quinn
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Quinn

Short inspection of St John's Community Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 June 2015.

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 section 5 inspection.

You, your senior leadership team and governors provide impressive leadership for the school. Your evaluation of the quality of education the school provides is accurate. You have pinpointed the areas for improvement and successfully addressed these, including the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. For example, you recognised that pupils were not achieving well enough in mathematics at the end of 2017. You and your subject leader for mathematics carried out a detailed analysis of why this was the case. As a result, you put in place training and support for staff. Consequently, pupils' progress accelerated, and mathematics outcomes improved in 2018. This year, you have been working hard to improve pupils' outcomes in reading. The teaching of phonics and reading is strong in the early years and in key stage 1. You have also been focusing on improving reading lessons in key stage 2. However, you have not considered checking how pupils apply the knowledge and skills they learn in reading lessons when they are reading on their own. The progress pupils make in writing is improving but improvements are not consistent across all classes.

You have built a strong and effective staff team. One teacher told me:

'Professional development, communication and teamwork have really improved. We talk a lot more to each other about the children's learning and we get fantastic support from subject leaders.'

Staff were particularly pleased with last year's training in teaching mathematics because you devised a strong, supportive model for improvement, including working alongside other staff and subject leaders. All the responses I received to the staff questionnaire were positive.

All the parents and carers I spoke to, and most of those who responded to Parent View, were positive about the quality of education you provide for their children. One parent told me: 'I've always found the school very supportive, caring and encouraging. Nothing is too much trouble and they respond quickly to any concerns you have.' Another parent mentioned the rapid progress her daughter is making in mathematics, saying, 'She used to be quite worried about maths and now she loves it.' All the parents told me how much they appreciate the learning cafés you and the staff provide because they know how you are teaching their children and can help them better at home.

Pupils enjoy coming to school because, as one pupil told me: 'I learn a lot and I've made so many friends. The minute I walked in everyone came over to me and asked me to play with them.' Another pupil explained why they enjoy lessons: 'If I don't feel challenged, I can tell the teachers and there's always a greater challenge for me to work on.'

Safeguarding is effective.

All your safeguarding policies and procedures are robust and meet requirements. Staff training is effective. Staff know how to deal with safeguarding concerns and are confident about completing the required documentation if an incident occurs. You liaise effectively with external agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are safe. Your school counsellor makes a strong contribution to supporting families in need of additional help. Parents are confident about talking to her and greatly value this service.

Pupils say they feel safe in school. One pupil told me: 'Last year, I didn't have a very good year. My friends, the teachers and the counsellor helped me a lot.' A few parents and pupils raised concerns about bullying in Parent View and in the online questionnaire for pupils. I found no evidence to support these concerns during the inspection. Pupils told me they are confident about talking to adults if there is 'an argument' and parents told me how children 'look out for each other'. One parent was particularly impressed:

'This is a really inclusive school because all the different age groups help each other. If a child in class looks a bit unhappy then the other children go and ask them why. They all work and play together so well.'

Inspection findings

- In my first line of enquiry, I wanted to check the effectiveness of your actions to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence. You have strong systems in place to ensure that pupils attend school on time every day. The school counsellor takes an active role in supporting those families who find this particularly challenging. There are strong incentives to encourage pupils to come to school, with a range of rewards that pupils like. In addition, pupils enjoy learning because lessons are interesting and suitably challenging. You explained that there has been a lot of illness this year. However, you ensure that you know the reason why pupils are not at school and that they are safe.
- My second line of enquiry was about the provision you make for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). My particular focus was the high number of pupil exclusions. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works closely with the school counsellor and together they provide appropriate and effective support to all pupils with SEND. They have put strong systems in place to support the increasing numbers of pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues. Exclusion is only used as a last resort, for example if a pupil's behaviour towards staff or other pupils is inappropriate.
- The school has a high proportion of pupils looked after by the local authority. You make strong provision to meet the needs of these pupils.
- My third line of enquiry was about your actions to improve pupils' progress in writing from the early years to Year 6. You and the English leader have identified improving the quality of pupils' writing as the next priority on your improvement plan. The English leader has already worked with teachers, giving them new resources and ideas to broaden pupils' vocabulary for writing. Teachers read good-quality stories to pupils every day, both to encourage them to read for pleasure and to introduce them to new storytelling language.
- When I scrutinised pupils' writing across the school, it was evident that there are inconsistencies in the quality of writing in different year groups. For example, where the teaching of writing is strong, pupils do not just write about what their characters do but spend time describing how they feel and the places they go to. You have booked training for all staff for the beginning of next term, when you plan to focus on improving the teaching of writing in all year groups.
- My fourth line of enquiry focused on how you are improving the reading of most-able pupils in key stage 2. The teaching of reading in key stage 2 has been your school improvement priority this term. You and the English leader have provided training for staff in how to develop pupils' understanding of what they are reading. In lessons, staff ask probing questions to ensure that pupils understand what they are reading. In addition, teachers collect words that pupils have not come across before and teach them a range of ways to work out or look up the meaning of these words.
- In addition, the governors challenged you to consider how you use teachers' expertise in key stage 2. As a result, you have timetabled teachers to teach either mathematics or English in upper key stage 2. This effective use of expertise is supporting improvements in pupils' outcomes in English and mathematics.

However, you and the English leader have not checked that pupils are effectively applying the skills they are learning in lessons when they are reading on their own.

- My final line of enquiry was about the impact of your actions to improve the curriculum. You, senior leaders and subject leaders have reviewed and started to rewrite your curriculum. Subject leaders have taken subject objectives from the national curriculum and considered how pupils can progress in learning these objectives across the school and within the topics you have selected. Although there is still additional work to do to ensure that key subject concepts that underpin knowledge and skills are effectively developed in all year groups, you are well on the way to completing this work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils use the knowledge and skills they are taught in reading lessons in key stage 2 effectively when they are reading on their own
- the teaching of writing is strong and effective across all year groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the deputy headteacher, the SENCo, the school counsellor, the governors, the staff, the subject leaders for English, mathematics, music and physical education, a representative from the local authority, pupils and parents. I observed learning and teaching in all classes, with a focus on the teaching of reading in key stage 2 and on the provision for pupils with SEND. Most-able pupils in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 read to me. I scrutinised a range of documents, including your self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I scrutinised pupils' writing in English and other subjects with the English leader and deputy headteacher. I scrutinised a range of safeguarding documentation and a sample of pupils' files. I scrutinised 34 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire for parents, 14 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 24 responses to the online questionnaire for pupils.