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Mr Anthony Orlik
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Dear Mr Orlik

Short inspection of Blue Coat Church of England Aided Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 3 April 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have established a strong and united staff team who work with enthusiasm and expertise to create a positive learning environment. Together with governors, you have recently restructured the leadership team. This has improved leadership capacity and strengthened the existing federation with the infant school. For example, the English and mathematics leaders oversee the progress of pupils in both schools. This has improved the continuity of education for pupils and enables leaders to track pupils' progress from Nursery through to Year 6. Transition between the infant and junior schools is smooth and pupils settle quickly in Year 3.

Blue Coat Juniors is a happy and welcoming community. Pupils from a wide range of religious, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds work and play together harmoniously. They mutually respect each other, and this creates a positive climate to support the good learning seen across the school. Pupils show good manners and enjoy school. Attendance is above the national average.

You have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils' cultural development is strongly supported. French is taught across the school and all pupils learn to play a musical instrument in Years 5 and 6 to a good standard. The 'debate mate' team has also achieved impressive success by reaching the finals of a national debating competition. Regular trips, visitors and assemblies complement the learning in classrooms.

The school has addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Pupils are provided with more time to practise and apply their skills in writing and mathematics in other subject areas. This has been particularly successful in improving outcomes in writing. There is a rising trend in both attainment and progress at the end of key stage 2. Greater levels of challenge are also provided for all pupils, not just the most able, particularly in mathematics. However, weaknesses remain in the progress of disadvantaged pupils in reading, pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics and the excessive number of fixed-term exclusions for unacceptable behaviour.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff have created a climate where pupils feel safe. All staff are fully trained on a range of safeguarding issues and they know and follow the procedure for reporting concerns. Systematic record-keeping of concerns raised is in place. Swift and appropriate action is taken when incidents are logged or reported, including referrals made to the local authority. Recruitment checks on the suitability of staff to work in the school are carried out in accordance with current guidance.

Pupils say that they are safe in school. Through assemblies, lessons and visiting speakers, pupils are taught to keep safe in the local area. They have a good understanding of road, fire and online safety. Pupils understand the different types of bullying and say that staff swiftly deal with it, if it occurs. The majority of parents spoken to, and those who responded to the school's questionnaire and Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, feel that their children are safe. The well-being of staff, in relation to their workload and mental health, is also considered carefully. Staff appreciate the 'no emails after 6pm or at weekends' ruling.

Inspection findings

- My first focus in the inspection was the reading progress made by disadvantaged pupils. This is because they make less progress than other pupils nationally. Termly assessments help identify which pupils are falling behind. Additional support and interventions are implemented to help pupils catch up, for example 'beanstalk readers' in Year 4 and better reading support in Year 6. Most pupils are making progress, but not enough for all pupils to reach age-related expectations. This is because adults do not check that pupils read a variety of different texts regularly at home and school. The books that most disadvantaged pupils choose to read independently are too easy and lack challenge. This limits their progress.
- Leaders have rightly identified reading as an area of priority this year. You have purchased some high-quality books and introduced a whole-class text approach in each year group. These books are read daily and are age-appropriate. During the inspection, it was clear that pupils were enjoying reading 'The Sheep-Pig' in Year 3. Teachers skilfully use guided reading sessions to develop pupils' higher-order skills, for example inference, deduction, skimming and scanning. Teachers model reading with appropriate expression and use effective questioning to check

pupils' understanding. However, the condition of other classroom texts and the school's library books is shabby. They do not attract pupils to read them or encourage an appreciation of books. There is a lack of quality reading material in school for pupils to read independently.

- You provide a clear direction for the school and have created an effective senior leadership team which shares your high expectations and ambition. Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is honest and accurate. Leaders and governors know precisely what is working well and where further improvements are needed. This is because regular checks on teaching are carried out and pupils' progress is tracked meticulously. Inspection findings show that teachers' assessments of pupils' work are accurate.
- Governors receive comprehensive information through meetings and headteacher reports. This ensures that they have a detailed and accurate overview of the school. Link governors meet with subject leaders to appraise specific areas of the curriculum or school. They visit school regularly and are highly committed to improving the outcomes for pupils. External consultants are also commissioned to provide an external and objective view. This helps validate leaders' own evaluations.
- In mathematics, I looked at the level of challenge presented for pupils, especially the most able. This was linked to a development point from the previous inspection report. Good levels of challenge are set for pupils of all abilities, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils' workbooks show that regular problem-solving activities are built into daily lessons. Pupils successfully apply their knowledge of number operations to solve complex problems. Additional work is set for the most able pupils to extend their knowledge and skills and ensure that they reach the higher standards. However, other pupils' reasoning skills are underdeveloped, especially those of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, too few reach the higher standards in mathematics.
- A further key line of enquiry focused on provision for pupils with SEND. This is because published data shows a downward trend in their progress in writing and mathematics. The school's planning shows that a range of interventions and support is in place. Pupils are assessed on entry to and exit from these programmes. Results are positive, with many pupils making strong gains and catching up. Work in pupils' books also shows that pupils are supported appropriately and are making good progress this year. The special educational needs coordinator has a detailed knowledge and understanding of pupils' individual needs. Well-trained staff provide good support for pupils with complex difficulties in the school's nurture room. Good links exist with external agencies to provide specialist support to individual pupils. As a result, pupils with SEND are making better progress in writing and mathematics.
- My final line of enquiry was about the typicality of pupils' behaviour. The most recent published figures for fixed-term exclusions show that these are above the national average. Inspection findings confirm that behaviour across the school is positive. Most pupils behave well. They know and follow the clear behaviour policy. Staff manage low-level incidents effectively. There is only a small number

of pupils in the school with behaviour problems. You record and monitor incidents thoroughly. You have introduced a new 'success centre' on the infant site. This caters for a small group of pupils with challenging behaviour and at risk of permanent exclusion. Good-quality support and teaching are provided. As a result, the school is calmer and the numbers of exclusions are reducing. Nevertheless, the number of fixed-term exclusions is too high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils make good progress in reading and are provided with good-quality and challenging reading books to read at home and in school
- teaching develops pupils' mathematical reasoning skills so that a greater proportion reach the higher standards, especially disadvantaged pupils
- fixed-term exclusions continue to reduce.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy executive headteacher, the English and mathematics leaders for the federation and the special educational needs coordinator. I also met with five members of the governing body. I discussed the work of the school, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. We visited the 'success centre' on the infant school site, which caters for pupils at risk of exclusion. I observed a guided reading lesson in Year 3 with the deputy headteacher and listened to a selection of pupils read. We observed mathematics in all Year 6 classrooms and looked at a sample of pupils' books.

The school's own information about pupils' attainment and progress was scrutinised. I examined a range of documents, including the school's evaluation of its work, the school's improvement plan and your reports to governors. I took account of the 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's parent survey. I spoke to parents as they collected their children from school to get an up-to-date and wider range of views.