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Mrs Jane Wilkinson
Headteacher
St Francis Church of England Aided Junior School
Scholars Path
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Dear Mrs Wilkinson

Short inspection of St Francis Church of England Aided Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 18 June 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 April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have upheld a school culture where pupils' talents are celebrated and where there is a real sense of community. As one pupil told me: 'It is a small school and we are all very close.'

The previous inspection report asked you to improve boys' progress, ensure that the pupil premium was having a better impact on disadvantaged pupils, and improve outcomes in mathematics.

Since the last inspection, you have improved the quality of teaching further, particularly in mathematics. Teachers ensure that there are ample opportunities for pupils to use their mathematics skills and apply them to solving problems. Teachers question pupils effectively in mathematics lessons to ensure that they gain a deep understanding of how mathematics works. Pupils were keen to tell me how they are well challenged in mathematics and also how much they enjoyed the lessons. The improvements in teaching for all pupils has also ensured that boys make just as much progress as girls. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment is improving year on year to be closer to that of others in the school and nationally.

Members of the governing body have an impressively detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and areas that need further development. The chair, through his work with other governing bodies is in an excellent position to challenge and support school leaders, for example on the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The planning meeting, which takes

place at the beginning of the year, ensures that all governors are very clear about what needs improving and how improvements will be monitored.

The pupils I met were thoughtful and perceptive about the quality of their education. The most able pupils said that while the work they received in English and mathematics was challenging, the work in other subjects was sometimes too easy. They said that the things they do help them to understand the world around them. For example, to supplement their work on the Tudors, they visited Durham Cathedral. On the morning of the inspection, all of Year 5 visited a synagogue. In the afternoon they were eager to tell me all about it, adding in a few words of Hebrew they had learned. Pupils said that the philosophy work they do makes them think deeply about sometimes difficult topics. I was impressed by their depth of thought and the breadth of vocabulary that they used in conversation. For example, they spoke to me about the racist attitudes they sometimes encounter outside the school and how they must 'rise above it'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. You have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, whereby all staff are well aware of what they should do if they have any concerns. Your procedures for vetting and checking new members of staff are detailed.

The computerised records that you keep are well organised. I could see that when a member of staff registers a concern, it is immediately followed up and referred onto outside agencies if appropriate.

The pupils I spoke to understood how to use the internet safely and told me that bullying is a rarity. This is verified in your records, showing that you have very few instances of bullying. None of the parents I spoke to had any concerns about safeguarding in the school.

Inspection findings

- Firstly, I looked at whether pupils with SEND receive good support and make good progress. While they make generally good progress, it could be better. I found that teachers have good subject knowledge about how to get the best out of pupils with SEND. Education, health and care plans are of good quality. However, assessment is not sharp enough to identify the next steps in learning for pupils. Pupils with SEND follow interventions to help them to catch up with their peers. However, not all these interventions are measured to ensure that they are having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Secondly, I was curious to see if the behaviour of boys was good and whether fewer boys were receiving fixed-term exclusions. I found boys were delightful in class, contributing well to lessons and displaying impeccable manners. These positive attitudes to their learning are reflected in their good progress. Exclusions have fallen and are now below the national average.

- Thirdly, I looked at the breadth and depth of the curriculum. I found that physical education (PE) has a high profile in the school, supported well by additional funding for PE and sports. Pupils were keen to tell me that they had a visit from a professional basketball player, who had inspired many of them.
- Many pupils learn musical instruments, including brass instruments and the ukulele. In pupils' books there is much evidence of subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics being taught regularly. However, the work sometimes lacks challenge for the most able. Moreover, the tasks that are given to pupils in these subjects often duplicate what is asked of them in writing lessons. Consequently, subject-specific knowledge is not developed as well as it might be in those other subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in subjects outside of reading, writing and mathematics:
 - the most able pupils are well challenged
 - the tasks that pupils do improve pupils' knowledge in those subjects rather than duplicate what they are asked to do in writing lessons
- they improve outcomes further for pupils with SEND by ensuring that:
 - their next steps in learning are clearer and more precise
 - any interventions that they follow are carefully measured to ensure that they are having a strong impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Jones
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and your deputy headteacher and the chair of the governing body with two other governors. I had a telephone conversation with the local authority school improvement partner. I spoke to six pupils from Year 6 over lunchtime and listened to four Year 6 pupils reading. While in classrooms I observed teaching, spoke to pupils and looked through the work in their various books, including art sketchbooks.

I considered a range of documentation, including the school development plan, the summary of self-evaluation, behaviour records, records relating to pupils with SEND

and safeguarding documents. Since there were insufficient responses to Ofsted's questionnaire Parent View, I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the school day.