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Mr Chris Dobson
Headteacher
St James Church of England Primary Academy
Brook End
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Dear Mr Dobson

Short inspection of St James Church of England Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You were appointed in September 2016, when the school became part of St Chad's Academies Trust. You successfully managed significant changes to staffing and governance. You promptly and accurately evaluated the school's effectiveness, setting a clear shared vision and a strong collaborative approach to improvement.

With the support of a small, creative and committed staff, you have established a happy and caring school with high expectations for every pupil. Many parents and carers value the good relationships that exist between the staff and parents. Several parents commented on your visible presence at the school gate at the start and end of the day. One parent, writing on Parent View, typified the views of many in saying:

'This is a great school. Mr Dobson is always on the gate; the teachers are always available. They all want the best for the children. There is never a day when my children don't want to come to school.'

Since joining the academy trust, governance has been streamlined. Members of the local academy committee are very clear on their roles and responsibilities. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. They help to set and model the school's priorities and values. They

work effectively with the trust board members to provide appropriate support and challenge for the school.

Staff value the increased opportunities to learn from the professional networks and learning hubs provided by the academy trust. They particularly appreciate the sessions when they moderate samples of pupils' work with colleagues from other schools. Teachers' comments include: 'In a small school like this it is a huge advantage for us to work and learn with staff in other schools. It keeps us looking forward and trying new ideas.'

You have successfully addressed the areas of improvement from the previous inspection. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to discuss and evaluate their work. As a result, pupils are increasingly aware of what they need to do to improve. At the end of Year 6 in 2018, standards continued to rise. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard or higher in reading, writing and mathematics combined was above the national average. However, further work is required to make sure that all pupils make strong progress across key stage 2 and reach higher standards, particularly in reading.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff know every child and their family very well. You follow through any concern diligently and you work with external agencies to seek solutions. Your detailed records and day-to-day notes reflect this.

Staff value the constant support, training and guidance that they receive for safeguarding. They fully understand their role in keeping children safe. Pupils are aware of how the school works to keep them safe. During the inspection, a number of fathers were in school to share lunchtime with their children in celebration of Fathers' Day. Pupils confidently explained the security systems in place for any visitors to school. They explained that 'All visitors, even our dads, have to be checked at the door, registered and wear a badge.'

The school values of 'love, friendship and respect' underpin everything in school. This helps to create the inclusive culture where all children, regardless of needs or ability, are welcomed and supported. The curriculum is used effectively to raise pupils' awareness of how to stay safe and helps them to recognise and avoid risk. This is evident in pupils' work on online safety and in their discussions. For example, one pupil said that: 'You should never be pushed into something that you feel uncertain about – whether you are online or in real life. That's not friendship, it's called peer pressure.'

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely at pupils' attainment and progress in reading. You have taken decisive actions to improve the teaching of early reading. New approaches to teaching phonics are now established. Teachers

make sure that children's reading books help them to practise the sounds that they have learned. Teachers read aloud to children every day. As a result, children develop enthusiasm and an interest in reading. This is having a positive impact. In the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2018, every child achieved the expected standard.

- Systems to make sure that pupils read widely and continue to develop fluency and comprehension skills are not well established. For example, pupils in key stage 2 do not have regular experiences of participating in discussion about their reading. As a result, they are not challenged to explain their understanding, listen to others and experience new vocabulary and new authors. This prevents them from reading at greater depth.
- You have taken some actions to address this. Key stage 2 teachers now systematically set reading tasks as part of topic-based work. As a result, pupils routinely apply their reading skills across the curriculum and widen their experiences of different types of reading material. Your records show that the proportion of pupils who are working at or above the expected standard in reading is increasing across most classes. Further work is needed to ensure that these approaches are consistent across the school and that improvements are sustainable.
- Leaders have taken effective action to bring about improvement in attendance. For some time, overall attendance has been lower than in most other primary schools. You monitor attendance information carefully and respond swiftly to any absences. You keep a close eye on the patterns of absence that might indicate safeguarding or welfare concerns. Close work with the local authority to identify and address the particular reasons for absence has led to more rigorous procedures to tackle unauthorised absences. As a result, the rate of attendance has improved and is currently above the national average.
- The last line of enquiry looked closely at the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning. The work in pupils' books and on display around the school is testimony to the wide range of subjects taught. Teachers plan creative and interesting lessons linked to topics. Pupils particularly enjoy the links made between subjects, such as their paintings of sunsets over the savannah as part of their African studies.
- However, pupils do not always develop secure subject-specific knowledge and skills from these experiences. For example, plans are not in place to ensure that pupils develop their use of geographical or historical knowledge, understanding and skills as they move through the school. As a result, pupils' subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding are not secure or deep in a range of subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching routinely and systematically builds pupils' comprehension skills so that

they become fluent, confident readers who read for purpose and pleasure

- the content of the wider curriculum is sequenced well to make sure that pupils develop subject-specific knowledge and skills across the curriculum and, as a result, achieve well in a range of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and all staff. I also met with the chair and the vice-chair of the local academy committee and three other members. I visited all classes with you, where we observed teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work. I spoke informally with pupils during the day.

I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and took account of 31 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, including free-text responses. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and information about safeguarding.