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Mr Keith Harvey
Headteacher
St Nicolas C.E. Junior School
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Dear Mr Harvey

Short inspection of St Nicolas C.E. Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 25 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 May 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 worked with determination to tackle the areas for improvement. The staff are proud to work at the school and enjoy working as part of the team, with everyone supporting each other under your leadership. They rightly believe that the school works well with parents and the community to achieve the best results for pupils. The school motto, 'love your neighbour as you love yourself', is lived out in all the relationships at the school, between pupils, staff and parents.

Parents speak enthusiastically about how happy their children are and how well they are doing at the school. Parents say that they can raise concerns with the headteacher and with staff, all of whom are very keen to do whatever is needed for the children. They appreciate the hard work all staff put into ensuring that their children are cared for and do well. One parent said about the school, 'It is a fantastic school because it supports the whole child, not just the academic side.'

Parents and pupils appreciate the many opportunities provided for pupils to broaden their experiences and become increasingly independent. The two residential trips enable pupils to develop their resilience and confidence. The variety of after-school clubs are very popular and encourage pupils to get involved. The current topic-based approach to learning enables pupils to experience the full breadth of the curriculum. However, pupils' work in subjects other than mathematics and English is not always of the same high quality as in the core subjects.

You have maintained and built upon the strengths that were identified at the last inspection. Pupils continue to enjoy lessons. They particularly love their writing and mathematics lessons, which are well planned and interesting, enabling pupils to develop their skills. The strong focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has continued and is evident in the respect pupils show each other and the adults they work with. Support for individual pupils has been maintained and developed even further. The nurture group provides a safe and supportive setting for pupils who experience challenges in coping with school life. The provision is carefully adapted to meet their needs and enables them to be successful.

Governors are very involved in the school and provide robust challenge and support for school leaders. They visit the school to check that what they are told can be seen in class, collecting useful evidence to ensure that they are effective in their roles. They sensibly check the progress of groups of pupils who do not do quite as well as they should, such as disadvantaged pupils and pupils who join the school with abilities that are below those typical for their age.

You have successfully tackled the areas that were identified for improvement at the last inspection: teachers' use of assessment during lessons and use of pupils' targets. Teachers routinely use assessment during lessons so that they know what pupils can and cannot do. There are a range of useful assessment and feedback methods which pupils use with confidence. Pupils evaluate their own work and identify if they need further support, although this is now also usually picked up during lessons by teachers' frequent checks on pupils' work. Pupils say that they know their targets and that teachers remind them of these. In some classes, teachers' feedback in books identifies when pupils' work relates to or meets targets.

Safeguarding is effective.

Appropriate training ensures that all staff know what to do in the event of a concern. Once reported, the designated lead ensures that action is taken to keep pupils safe. Appropriate checks are carried out on new staff and these are recorded centrally. Governors check safeguarding appropriately and ensure that leaders manage concerns well.

Pupils are encouraged to keep themselves safe and have confidence that staff keep them safe. They learn about water, road and fire safety, as well as being safe online. Pupils are very confident that they can talk to a member of staff if they are worried.

Attendance is checked and reported on appropriately, identifying which groups of pupils do not attend regularly enough. Leaders take sensible action to improve attendance. The high number of fixed-term exclusions is as a result of the school's successful efforts to keep disengaged pupils in education, often linked to the 'fresh start' programme.

Inspection findings

- In order to evaluate the school's effectiveness, we selected some key areas to explore in detail. These included: exploring why progress in reading, writing and mathematics is average; how well the needs of disadvantaged pupils are met; and the breadth and depth of the curriculum.
- Over the past three years, progress in reading, writing and mathematics has been variable. It is often below or in line with the national average, even though the percentage of pupils achieving the expected and higher levels are well above that in other schools nationally. In order to tackle this, leaders have identified two key contributors. Leaders have sensibly begun to work with the infant school to ensure that teachers at both schools are in agreement with the end-of-key-stage assessments. Leaders have also identified that pupils who did not achieve as well as they should when they joined the school have not always been supported well enough to catch up. Teachers now focus more attention on these pupils, providing specific teacher or teaching-assistant time to help them make more progress than is typical. There are signs that these pupils are catching up, but leaders recognise that this work is in the early stages.
- Over time, disadvantaged pupils have not done as well as they should. Although support was in place, it did not result in the necessary improvements. In the last two years, leaders have begun to coordinate their work to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. As a result of the recent change in approach, teachers now take overall responsibility for the progress of these pupils. They now liaise appropriately with leaders, the special educational needs leader, emotional-support and inclusion teams, and teaching assistants to ensure that the support is exactly right and is making a difference. Although these pupils have not yet caught up to where they should be, most are now making stronger progress in some areas. The statutory reporting on pupil premium spend is useful but does not provide enough clarity about where these pupils are making more progress and beginning to catch up.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. However, the work in these lessons is not given the same high status as writing and mathematics. Teachers ensure good coverage of subjects and topics, but it is apparent from what pupils say and from their work in books that they do not value these lessons as much as they enjoy 'the big write' and mathematics. The current plans to improve the curriculum are positive but these have not yet been implemented. Pupils speak enthusiastically about 'the daily mile' and about practical subjects, such as art and physical education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue their work to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment, so that these pupils catch up
- pupils' work across the wider curriculum is of the same high standard as in

writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you and the deputy headteacher, other leaders, teachers, a group of governors, including the chair, and a group of pupils. With you and the deputy headteacher, I visited all classes and looked at pupils' work in their books. I reviewed the school's information about pupils' progress and attainment. I also reviewed other documentation linked to safeguarding, governance and school improvement. I spoke to parents in the playground at the beginning of the school day and took account of the 91 responses to Parent View. I also took account of 19 staff responses to the online questionnaire.