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Mrs Suzanne Howard
Headteacher
St John's CofE Primary School, Kearsley
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Dear Mrs Howard

Short inspection of St John's CofE Primary School, Kearsley

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since the last inspection, the previous headteacher has left the school and you have been in post for three weeks as the new headteacher. In this short time, you have already acquired a clear understanding of the school, its improvement over the years from inadequate to good, its strengths and its areas for improvement. As staff commented, 'The headteacher has already got a good grasp of the school's strengths as well as highlighting some areas for development.' You are already getting to know the staff, parents and pupils in detail.

You and your leadership team are committed to upholding and strengthening the Christian ethos of the school. Visitors can detect the warm and caring approach you take, from first entering school. From the early start in breakfast club, pupils are encouraged to eat together as a community, play and talk together; this gives pupils a positive and calm beginning to the day.

Your mission statement that 'we all work together to live by our inclusive Christian values' is seen in action during collective worship in the morning. Pupils enter the halls quietly and respectfully, ready to begin the day. In the key stage 2 assembly, pupils were taking part in the theme of 'Candlemas' and could talk to their neighbour about who the famous people on display were and why they could be

seen as inspirations, or 'lights of the world'. Pupils demonstrated their knowledge of British democracy, identifying the current Prime Minister and her role in society. Pupils in both key stages were respectful in prayer and this set the tone for calm, orderly behaviour which was seen all around the school throughout the inspection.

In every classroom, pupils are engaged in their learning. Pupils say that they love lessons, stating that they are 'enjoyable but educational at the same time'. They feel that they know how well they are doing in mathematics, English, religious education and science, but are less sure of their progress in topic-based lessons. They are clear on expectations about behaviour and speak highly of the strategy used consistently throughout the school, which encourages pupils to become independent and resilient learners.

In lessons, pupils show good attitudes to learning and work cooperatively together to develop their ideas and move their learning on. Teachers provide activities which build on the prior achievements and knowledge of pupils. Teachers deploy teaching assistants well, providing foci for targeted pupils to maximise their progress. Good questioning from staff pushes pupils to think more deeply about their work and pupils are encouraged to share their responses with each other. Older pupils are confident in the use of adverbials and adjectives and can use words like 'gloomy' and 'mysterious' to describe a dark and spooky setting. Pupils have written some excellent and sophisticated poetry about wartime.

Pupils have the opportunity to develop a wide range of additional skills, through the extensive variety of after-school clubs on offer to them every afternoon. Pupils can learn many new skills, such as Spanish and healthy cooking, get fit and active through Boxercise and street dance, or improve their computer skills.

Pupils can talk ably about the work you and your staff do to promote British values and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Across the school, pupils know right from wrong and they are clear that their behaviour is very good because they value and respect the school's code of conduct and its ethos. Pupils are also respectful of other religions and cultures. Pupils say that all people are 'encouraged to join in, even if they are a different faith – everyone gets treated the same'. Pupils speak highly of the peer mediators in school who help pupils to settle in and are available for advice and support. You and your team are developing responsible, moral and articulate young people. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Parents are very supportive of the school and all parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire believe that their child makes good progress at school. They are positive about the good-quality teaching their child receives and almost all parents state that their child is happy at school. Pupils told the inspector how much they enjoyed coming to school. Staff are overwhelmingly proud to be a member of staff at St John's. They feel supported by leaders, that they are treated fairly and with respect and that they really enjoy teaching at this school.

Governors, senior leaders and staff have taken action to address the areas for

improvement since the last inspection. At the previous inspection, inspectors identified the need to improve the quality of teaching. In response, leaders have encouraged teachers to take part in training for middle leadership and in outstanding teaching. You ensure that new teachers are well supported to quickly develop the skills needed to be effective. To further develop questioning throughout the school, leaders have built this in as part of the performance management targets for teaching assistants.

You were also asked to raise expectations of behaviour even higher, especially outside classrooms. You have strengthened the behaviour policy, made your expectations clear to pupils and parents and have developed and trained staff to lead play sessions during social times so that these are calmer and much more structured. Pupils are appreciative of the new activities at break- and lunchtimes. Behaviour logs show a decrease in incidents during social times. The sterling work of the pastoral support team is making a big impact. The leadership of pastoral support is making a real difference to the behaviour of pupils and in the support available for them and their families.

The previous inspection team also asked governors and leaders to make full and creative use of the outdoor area for the early years foundation stage. Governors have invested money in enhancing outdoor learning. This is continually being improved and can be seen in the variety of play equipment now available for children to use.

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps for the school. First, you acknowledged that you will continue to improve attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your new focus on reducing persistent absence is starting to have an impact, as rates of persistent absence have fallen. We discussed the need to ensure that parents continue to receive timely support. Second, you acknowledge the need to continue to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, particularly in mathematics, so that more pupils reach or exceed the expected standard at both key stages. Finally, you are determined to improve teaching and learning still further by supporting new teachers. You are adamant that your pupils deserve the best quality of teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The leadership team ensures that staff receive regular training and that those responsible for safeguarding and recruitment have appropriate and recent qualifications. Governors also receive appropriate training and have a clear vision to provide 'care beyond the academic' to all pupils and their families. All safeguarding records, documentation and procedures are compliant and fit for purpose. Pupils feel safe in school and parents agree with this viewpoint. Pupils report that there are rarely any incidents of bullying and that if they do occur, they are dealt with swiftly and effectively. You ensure that pupils are taught how to stay safe online and that they are taught how to make positive and healthy decisions.

Inspection findings

- You are working to ensure that strong improvements are made in the teaching of mathematics across the school. You have ensured that the most experienced members of staff take responsibility for classes who experienced staffing changes last year. There is a comprehensive action plan to improve mathematics and the many strategies already in place are beginning to have a demonstrable effect on pupils' progress.
- Training in mathematics mastery has been undertaken. New resources have been purchased. Close monitoring of teaching and learning, including book scrutiny, is undertaken. The local authority is providing support in quality assuring your monitoring and in supporting members of staff as appropriate. The school is appreciative of this support and pleased with the positive impact it has had so far.
- Leaders have worked to engage parents in mathematics, such as in your recent 'open week' when parents saw many successful lessons in mathematics. Many parents commented on the excellent behaviour, teaching and learning seen in mathematics lessons.
- Teachers group pupils in a flexible way, dependent on the needs of individuals. Additional booster sessions take place before school, aided by the school's new approach to assessment, which allows teachers to identify pupils in need of early intervention.
- Your strategies are beginning to pay off. Disadvantaged pupils are now making more rapid progress than their peers, as seen in the work in pupils' books and in the school's assessment information.
- Pupils' attendance is currently still a mixed picture across different year groups. Leaders at all levels recognise the need to improve attendance. Leaders and governors appointed a pastoral care manager to lead these improvements. The pastoral team know pupils and families exceedingly well. They provide a first-class level of support for hard-to-reach and potentially vulnerable families.
- Attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains below the national average. However, the new pastoral team have improved the attendance of individuals and strengthened relationships with external agencies. Leaders and governors leave no stone unturned in getting families the support they need to get their children back in to school.
- Behaviour across the school, in and outside of lessons, continues to be good. Pupils are well mannered and are proud of their school. Their positive attitudes to learning make a strong contribution to progress in the classroom. Pupils move around the school in a sensible manner; they understand the school rules and comply with the high expectations of staff.
- Leaders have put effective measures in place to support the small minority of pupils who misbehave. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly this academic year and behaviour logs also show a similar improvement.
- New strategies to support behaviour, such as the introduction of peer mediators,

reward weeks and better use of social time, are having a beneficial effect.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on recent improvements in pupils' attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- they continue to maximise the recent improvements made to the quality of provision in mathematics, so that more pupils make good progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, the pastoral care manager, the special educational needs coordinator and members of the governing body. In addition, I held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner. I met formally with a group of pupils from across the school and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons. I observed teaching and learning in several classes and observed two assemblies. I examined a range of documentation, including those relating to safeguarding, minutes of the governing body meetings, attendance information, a range of policies, and the school's curriculum and assessment information. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered 15 responses to Ofsted's Parent View, nine responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text, and 21 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I also spoke to parents informally on the playground at the start of the school day.