

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



3 October 2017

Mrs Rebecca Hunter  
Headteacher  
St John's VA Church of England Primary School, Thornham  
Thornham Lane  
Slattocks  
Middleton  
Manchester  
M24 2SB

Dear Mrs Hunter

### **Short inspection of St John's VA Church of England Primary School, Thornham**

Following my visit to the school on 21 September 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 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Although only in post for a few days, you have established an incisive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and implemented actions that are empowering your deputy headteacher and leading to positive impact on the quality of teaching. You and your staff have immense pride in the school. You have an unquestionable commitment to improving the school, and building on the work of your predecessors. Pupils enjoy coming to school and those who spoke with me frequently referred to the school as a 'learning family'. Parents overwhelmingly support the school and recognise the impact you are already having, including improving communication. This is typified by a comment received through Parent View: 'My children are exceptionally lucky to attend such a wonderful school. I could not ask for a better education for my children.'

Governors and staff share your high expectations and together you have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. These related to improving further the progress that pupils make by enhancing the quality of teaching and the sharpening of leaders' development planning.

Teachers are dedicated and committed to improving their practice. They quickly act upon advice and guidance from your more sharply focused and more-frequent evaluations of their impact and receive appropriate training. The most recent focus has been on improving writing and literacy skills. Leaders' actions have brought about sustained

improvement in pupils' outcomes, particularly in writing. These actions include additional training for teachers and teaching assistants, amendments to policies and the adoption of new schemes of work to develop writing through talk. However, you are not complacent and recognise that further work is now required to enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding so that greater proportions attain at greater depth, particularly in mathematics.

Leaders' action planning has been improved strongly. Your carefully crafted current plans identify appropriate actions to address the school's development priorities. Plans include appropriate criteria and clear deadlines that allow governors and senior leaders to check that the plans are working throughout the year. Plans include a focus on both identifying and addressing the gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge and enhancing the skills of teachers to develop pupils' mathematical understanding at greater depth. They also include actions to enhance the somewhat tired provision for pupils to learn outdoors in the early years. It is, however, too soon yet to see the impact of your actions.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and followed closely. Documentation relating to safeguarding and the welfare of pupils is up to date and kept meticulously. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. Appropriate and frequent staff training, including a weekly practice scenario enacted during staff meetings, prompts discussion and tests your planned actions. All staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are vigilant about the potential risks pupils may face. Staff share information effectively with parents and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. Parents are well informed about how to help keep pupils safe and about general safeguarding developments through your weekly newsletters. Leaders follow up any absences rigorously to provide appropriate support to families and liaise appropriately with other authorities.

### **Inspection findings**

- You have only been in post a short time but already you have an incisive and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is because of your detailed and tenacious monitoring. You have empowered and made good use of other leaders in school, particularly your capable deputy headteacher. They contribute effectively to self-evaluation and lead improvement activities effectively.
- Governors effectively monitor the work of the school and demonstrate an accurate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. Governors are well informed because they frequently visit school to talk with pupils and staff. Governors regularly receive from you detailed analysis of the progress that pupils make. These reports now also contain additional suggested questions to help governors to probe more deeply the reasons behind the data. Governors frequently visit the school to see pupils and staff at work and use these visits well to check the accuracy of the information they receive. Formal meetings with subject leaders allow governors with specific responsibilities to check that actions are having the desired impact.
- Governors have not rigorously checked that the information for parents published on

the school's website is kept up to date. They recognise there are practical difficulties in amending the website. Further work is needed to ensure that the school's website is checked more frequently and that amendments can be easily made.

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection because teachers receive appropriate training that ensures that they have kept up to date with changes to the curriculum and enhances their strategies to teach it. This is particularly the case in writing, where the adoption of new schemes of work and different strategies to develop pupils' writing through talk have had strong positive impact on pupils' outcomes and the quality of writing seen in pupils' books in a wide range of subjects.
- You were disappointed at the outcomes in the progress that middle-ability pupils made in 2017 in mathematics. You have acted immediately to check and understand possible reasons for this downturn, and have acted quickly to implement appropriate actions to address this. These actions include sharpening assessment and tracking procedures to quickly spot and respond to individual pupils' needs and misconceptions. Additional training for teachers has enhanced their knowledge of strategies to help pupils to apply their mathematical skills and learn at greater depth. Teachers have responded well to your raised expectations and are already beginning to implement the recent advice and guidance you and your deputy headteacher have provided. For example, work in pupils' books and observations in classes show that teachers typically use questioning very well to promote pupils' reasoning skills, by asking them to explain how they arrived at answers. In upper key stage 2, a teacher challenged pupils to write multi-step calculation problems for others in the class and then asked them to explain how they would go about solving them.
- Teachers make good use of the outdoors to help pupils apply their skills and knowledge. Science is taught well, using experiences in the school grounds, so that pupils attain in line with the national average.
- The provision for children in the early years to learn outdoors is more limited. Resources are tired and the environment does not stimulate children's learning. You have detailed plans in place that have begun to be implemented, but it is too soon to see the impact of these actions.
- The pupil premium funding is used well. You consider carefully how this limited resource is used to have the best impact on disadvantaged pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils do well and make strong progress.
- Published attendance data shows that pupils' attendance is typically in line with or above the national average. Closer examination of the information highlights that some groups of pupils attend more frequently than others. Those groups with the lowest attendance rates also have the highest rates of persistent absence. These include girls, pupils who are disadvantaged, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, your careful tracking and detailed analysis show that very few pupils are absent without good reason, often linked to medical needs or illness. The small number of pupils who are persistently absent are improving their attendance quickly. You follow up all absences immediately and where necessary inform appropriate authorities. In school, a range of celebrations and activities strongly promote attendance. These include letters home to celebrate the overall attendance of some pupils and the progress made by others in improving their rate of attendance. A weekly class competition for the 'attendance cup' is eagerly fought

over, while the end-of-year ceremony celebrates and rewards those pupils with high levels of attendance across the year.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- greater proportions of pupils who leave key stage 1 with expected outcomes develop their knowledge and understanding at a greater depth to attain the highest standards, particularly in mathematics
- children in the early years have a high-quality outdoor area which is effectively used to promote their learning
- procedures are refined to ensure that the school's website meets requirements and provides up-to-date, high-quality information for parents.

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 Rochdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and your deputy headteacher and subject leaders of English and mathematics. I held a meeting with governors, including the chair of the governing body, who is also a diocesan officer and the local authority adviser who works with your school. I spoke with some pupils during lessons and around the school, and talked with a group of parents at the start of the school day. I took account of the information contained within the responses to the online questionnaires for parents (Parent View) and for pupils. There were no responses to the staff questionnaire.

I visited classrooms with you to observe pupils' learning, looked at their work in books and their records of achievement. We reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation documentation, action plans and other policies. I looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, including while they are online, recruitment checks and record-keeping.