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Mrs Gillian Wild
Headteacher
Prior's Mill Church of England Controlled Primary School
Clifton Avenue
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Dear Mrs Wild

Short inspection of Prior's Mill Church of England Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 October 2017 with Deborah Ashcroft, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your passion for, and high expectations of, the pupils, the staff and the school shines through. You have built a strong and ambitious team of senior leaders and are developing subject leadership throughout the school. Staff and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of you and your team.

Parents appreciate that you are 'always visible' around the school. They like the fact that your 'door is always open'. They look forward to receiving your weekly newsletters and mentioned that communication between the school and home has improved since the previous inspection. It is pleasing to note that leaders are intending to strengthen communication even further with the launch of a Prior's Mill 'app'.

Pupils are happy to attend Prior's Mill. They are compelling ambassadors for the school and exemplify the school's motto of 'minds to learn, hearts to care' well. Your pupils are polite, respectful, welcoming and eager to progress. They thrive in the safe and secure environment for learning that you have created. Their commitment to local, national and international charitable work is particularly impressive. Your pupils, from the youngest in the Nursery class to the eldest in Year 6, have exemplary attitudes to learning and a thirst for knowledge.

Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate. You have addressed the areas for development identified at the time of the previous inspection and have a firm

understanding of the current areas for improvement. These include developing subject leadership further, embedding the new curriculum for mathematics and making sure that the pupils in key stage 2 make better progress in reading.

Both you and your deputy headteacher have a deep understanding of effective teaching and learning. For example, during the inspection, you identified that a minority of teachers do not set work that is sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils in mathematics. You noted that these teachers do not use assessment information incisively to plan appropriate tasks.

The decision of leaders to appoint a 'pupil premium champion' has been very successful. Disadvantaged pupils attended more often during the 2016/17 academic year than they had in previous years. The number who were persistently absent reduced. A larger proportion arrive on time for school every day. As a result, they are making more rapid progress. Although small in number, disadvantaged pupils thrive at Prior's Mill.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are strong. Similarly, the school's risk assessments, such as those for the current building work, are robust. All staff have attended training in child protection recently. The designated person for child protection liaises well with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils access the support to which they are entitled.

Pupils are knowledgeable about staying safe online. They know the dangers of uploading their personal details and photographs onto social media platforms. Pupils feel safe in school. They told the inspection team that there is 'absolutely no bullying'. Governors are kept well informed about the small number and type of behaviour incidents that occur in school. They are able to identify trends and provide support and challenge to you and your leaders.

Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average for primary schools. Leaders are working hard to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent even further, and have had success working with disadvantaged pupils and their families.

Inspection findings

- The last cohort of Year 6 pupils made above-average progress in writing and mathematics from their starting points at the end of key stage 1. They did not make as much progress in reading. Leaders had identified reading in key stage 2 as an area for development prior to the inspection. An inspector read with pupils in Years 3 and 6 during the inspection and noted that they were reading books with just the right level of challenge. The pupils could explain the nuances of the texts confidently. Leaders' work to implement whole-school procedures for guided reading are beginning to bear fruit.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, especially in reading and writing. The coordinator for special educational needs (SENCo) seeks early help from a wide range of external agencies to address

children's needs in the early years. The SENCo ensures that teaching assistants are fully trained to deliver a wide range of interventions, for example mathematics interventions in Year 1.

- The vast majority of children enter the early years with skills and abilities that are appropriate for their age. The proportion who reach a good level of development has increased each year over time and is now well above the national average. This trend of continuous improvement is also seen in the results of the Year 1 screening check of phonics knowledge. The proportion of pupils achieving the standard has been significantly above the national average for the last three academic years.
- Leaders identified, quite correctly, that the school's most able pupils are not set challenging enough work, especially in mathematics. As a result, this group of pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable. The inspection team confirmed this area for development during visits to lessons that were undertaken jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Teachers are not using pupils' assessment information incisively to set work that meets the needs of the most able pupils in mathematics.
- Leaders implemented a new curriculum for mathematics at the beginning of the current academic year. They acknowledge that the impact of this new initiative should have been checked more rapidly to ensure that pupils are making at least good progress from their individual starting points.
- Governance is improving. The recently reconstituted governing body is beginning to challenge and support leaders with increased rigour. Governors have carried out an audit of their skills and, as a result, are in the process of appointing an additional governor with a background in education to the board. Governors, like you, are ambitious for the pupils who attend Prior's Mill.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils' reading skills in key stage 2 are developed further
- teachers use assessment information incisively to set challenging work for the most able pupils, especially in mathematics
- subject leaders are trained fully to check on the achievement of pupils in the subjects they lead.

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 Stockton-on-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders and four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I checked a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I examined information about pupils' achievement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and the school's most recent survey of pupils' views. In addition, I held discussions with representatives of Stockton-on-Tees local authority and the Church of England Diocese of Durham. I considered the contents of a letter received from a parent together with 123 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 61 free-text responses. Both inspectors visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment alongside you and your deputy headteacher. We checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks, talked formally to two groups of six pupils and talked more informally to pupils in lessons about their learning. An inspector read with pupils from Years 1, 3 and 6.