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Mrs McAvan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McAvan

Short inspection of St John's CofE (C) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2018, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Leaders and governors have maintained high standards at St John's. Outcomes at the end of key stages 1 and 2 have been consistently strong over the last two years. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are skilled leaders. They self-evaluate the school's key strengths and areas for development accurately.

St John's is proud of its Christian ethos and has a strong community feel. Pupils are proud to attend the school. All of the parents and carers that submitted responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, stated that they would recommend the school. The vast majority of parents that Ofsted received free-text messages from, or those that I spoke to at the school gate, are highly satisfied with the school. One parent commented 'The head and staff are welcoming and helpful.' This view was echoed by many other parents throughout the inspection.

St John's has several key strengths. Pupils' behaviour is very good. Pupils are courteous and caring and speak highly of staff. A group of key stage 2 pupils stated 'Everybody gets along and everyone is kind.' Many pupils have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. As a result of leaders' and governors' commitment to providing tuition, almost a quarter of pupils are members of the school's orchestra.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to further improve: teaching, by making sure that teachers reshape lessons to accelerate pupils' progress; progress in mathematics, by strengthening pupils' understanding of how to solve mathematical problems; and pupils' understanding of their targets so that they can take greater responsibility for their learning.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved further since the last inspection. Pupils' progress is at least in line with national levels by the time pupils leave at the end of key stage 2. Teachers use assessment on an ongoing basis to support their planning and ensure that pupils' needs are met.

Standards in mathematics have increased over the last two years. A very high proportion of pupils reach the expected standard in mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard is also better than the national average. Staff have received training to support the development of pupils' fluency, reasoning and problem-solving skills. Training has had a very positive impact on teaching skills and pupils' outcomes.

Older pupils are clear about the targets they are working towards. Pupils listen attentively to staff and are quick to act upon instructions and feedback. Older pupils also take time to edit their own work and consider how they can make improvements. This strategy is particularly evident in English. Pupils reread their work and adapt vocabulary and punctuation to make their writing even more engaging and interesting for the reader.

Leaders and governors are rightly proud of the school's strengths. They recognise that there is now further work to do in ensuring that: pupils are clear about the precise skills that they are learning in English lessons; the monitoring of the teaching of phonics is developed further so that any underachievement is quickly addressed; new governors are provided with training to enhance their skills; and the governing body reviews the performance of groups with a greater depth of scrutiny.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding at St John's and arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are clear about their responsibilities. Everyone that I met during the inspection feels that children are safe. Pupils' safety and welfare are a priority for staff. Staff care deeply about pupils and want them to flourish in this community school. Staff and pupils work hard to support pupils who are new to the school. Year 6 pupils 'buddy' with their younger peers in Reception to help them enjoy school life and feel confident.

The curriculum strongly supports pupils' safety. Pupils have the opportunity to learn about how to stay safe and look after themselves. Work has included: visits from university medical students who have run 'teddy bear hospitals' to help younger pupils learn about their body; community first responders teaching older pupils the principles of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR); and regular opportunities for pupils to participate in cycling proficiency and road safety events.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors use additional funding effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. This group of pupils is too small in number to draw any meaningful comparison across individual year groups. However, leaders track the achievement of disadvantaged pupils carefully and provide additional support where it is required.
- Over the last two years, the progress that boys make in writing by the end of key stage 2 has been lower than that of girls. A smaller proportion of boys achieve at a greater depth in writing in Year 6. Leaders have established a range of actions to develop writing further. A cornerstone of this work is ensuring that pupils have the skills to effectively edit and improve their work. This work is having a positive impact. Staff are also ensuring topics fully meet the interests of boys. During the inspection, the whole school was engaged in a writing project based upon 'Treasure Island'. From role play and hunting for treasure in Reception, to inventing different story endings and adding detail with brackets in Year 5, all boys were fully engaged. However, some boys were not clear about the exact skills they were developing. The stimulus for learning had more prominence for boys than the skills that they were developing in their writing.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils passing the phonics screening check was lower than the national average in Year 1. Leaders have responded swiftly to this dip in standards. Pupils have received additional support and the vast majority are on track to pass the retake at the end of Year 2. Though the school has established a systematic and robust approach to the teaching of phonics, leaders acknowledge that pupils' progress must be monitored even more closely so that any potential underachievement is addressed quickly.
- The local authority has worked effectively with the school to provide training and support to develop the teaching of reading. The teaching of reading has improved and staff have established a love of reading across the school. Reading diaries evidence the frequent opportunities that pupils have to read with adults at home and in school. As a result of the reading culture that has been created, almost half of pupils achieved at a higher standard by the end of key stage 2 in 2017. This is close to double the proportion of pupils that achieve at a higher standard nationally.
- An increasing number of pupils who speak English as an additional language are joining the school. Pupils' abilities are carefully assessed when they join the school. For those with limited English, a phonics programme is provided to ensure they catch up with their peers quickly.
- There have been significant changes to the membership of the governing body over the last year. While some governors have considerable experience, many are new to their roles. Minutes from governing body meetings demonstrate how governors challenge leaders and keep a close eye on pupil outcomes. However, there is scope for governors to analyse the performance of different groups of children further. Governors acknowledge that this is particularly important given some of the historical gaps in achievement between boys and girls.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils across all key stages, particularly boys, are clear about the precise skills they are learning in their English lessons so that the level of challenge is maintained and a higher proportion achieve at a greater depth in writing
- new governors are provided with training to develop their skills, and the governing body is given even more detailed assessment information so that governors can fully track the performance of different groups of pupils
- work continues to carefully monitor the progress that pupils make in phonics so that any underachievement is quickly addressed.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the start of the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to review the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. We agreed several key lines of enquiry and inspection activity to ascertain if the school remains good and safeguarding is effective.

I visited every classroom. I scrutinised the quality of reading records in key stage 1 and writing across key stage 2. Observations were undertaken jointly with leaders.

I met with the bursar to review the single central record. I also took account of other documents relating to safeguarding, including training records, risk assessments, fire drill logs, child protection files and the content of referrals made to the local authority.

I held a meeting with four members of the governing body including one of the vice-chairs of governors. I spoke with a representative from Staffordshire local authority via the telephone.

I met with parents at the start of the school day, reviewed the 48 responses to Parent View and 29 comments via Ofsted's free-text service. I took account of 40 responses to the pupil survey and 10 returns from the staff survey.