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19 June 2018

Mrs Kerry Coe
Headteacher
St John the Baptist Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
St John's Way
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Dear Mrs Coe

Short inspection of St John the Baptist Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 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 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. You lead by example and have ensured that the school's motto of 'everyone different: everyone loved' permeates the work of the school. You are dedicated to your pupils and to ensuring that the school is a haven of safety and security for them. Your strong Christian values are the hallmark of your school and they ensure that a warm welcome is extended to all who visit. You manage expertly two enhanced-provision classes on behalf of the local authority, for pupils who have additional and complex special educational needs. You are ably supported by your senior leaders, who share your commitment and dedication to the pupils and their families.

Strong pastoral care is given high priority. It is an important aspect of the school's work and one that you recognise is essential to pupils' emotional and physical well-being. All staff share your deep commitment to making pupils feel that they are cared for. This strongly supports pupils' highly positive and respectful attitudes to their learning and to each other and has ensured that pupils' behaviour remains good. The pupils I talked to during the inspection were unanimous in their positive feelings of safety and security. As one pupil said: 'It's like one big family here.' This unflinching commitment to inclusion is the bedrock of your vision for nurturing pupils to be successful, well-rounded individuals ready for the next stage in their learning and development.

Since the last inspection, you have maintained your focus on continuous

improvement in all aspects of the school's work. You have sought new partnerships as a means of sharing good practice and improving pupils' achievements. Your partnership with the local authority and your involvement in its 'raising achievement partnerships' are integral to your school improvement planning. Such work has ensured that the quality of teaching and learning remains good.

Your school improvement plan is a detailed document that identifies the right priorities for improvement. Accurate assessment arrangements and your precise analysis of pupils' assessment information mean that you have a very clear understanding of what needs to improve further. For example, you know that pupils' attainment in reading needs to improve further and you are well on your way to achieving this. Regular 'pupil progress' meetings with staff ensure that any pupils who may be falling behind in their learning are quickly identified and supported to catch up. As a result, even though pupils' attainment is below the national average, pupils make good progress from their often low starting points.

Over the course of this school year, you have completed a staffing restructure to create a 'middle tier' of leadership. This is to support you in your efforts to raise pupils' achievement further. Recently appointed middle leaders are enthusiastic in their role and are keen to play an integral part in raising pupils' achievement further. However, it is too early to gauge their effectiveness. We agreed that they need training and support to fulfil their roles effectively.

Governors are highly skilled and committed to the school. They give generously of their time to ensure that pupils are well cared for and are making good progress. There is a comprehensive induction programme for new governors to ensure that they quickly assume their strategic role. Governors have a very clear understanding of the school's priorities for improvement, because of their very detailed monitoring programme and their close working relationship with you and other leaders. As a result, governors play a full and active role in the school and offer you appropriate levels of support and challenge to ensure continuous improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, are vigilant in their work to keep pupils safe and give the very highest priority to ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff receive regular training to ensure that they are up-to-date with the latest government guidelines. You have established strong systems for staff to report any concerns, and this extends to any visitors to the school. Records of incidents and concerns are detailed and there is a clear chronology of actions taken. Referrals to outside agencies are made in a timely manner to ensure that pupils and their families get the support they need, when they need it.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection, pupils' progress in reading fell into the bottom 20% of schools nationally. Although there were notable improvements in 2017, I wanted to check the actions you have taken to improve the quality of teaching in reading

and to accelerate pupils' progress. It is clear from the many displays in classrooms and around the school that you have prioritised raising the profile of reading within the school successfully.

- You have worked hard to encourage pupils to read for pleasure and to read more regularly at home. The 'pupil reading champions' are selected from key stage 2 classes and promote reading at breaktime. Significant investment in purchasing books for your new library and rewards for pupils for being 'good' readers are demonstrative of your commitment to promote pupils' love of reading. It is heartening that so many pupils were demonstrating positive attitudes to the books they were reading during the inspection.
- At the same time, you have organised a significant range of staff training to improve the teaching of reading comprehension. All classes display your 'reading rules', which identify the important skills needed to read accurately for meaning. This is creating a common language for all pupils and is giving them a deeper understanding of what is expected of them. You are currently trialling approaches to the teaching of writing that start with reviewing quality texts. In addition, you are trialling computer software and whole-class weekly comprehension lessons. Your actions are leading to improved outcomes for pupils currently in the school, which are above those seen in 2017. However, we agreed that there is a need to embed pupils' higher-order reading skills further. We discussed undertaking a detailed evaluation of your 'pilot' programmes and completing a review of reading promotion across the wider curriculum, which will enable you to develop a clear approach to the teaching of reading, moving forward.
- You have strengthened your approach to the teaching of phonics, which has led to a three-year improvement in pupils' outcomes in the national Year 1 phonics screening check. While this is highly positive, our review of phonics teaching reflected some minor inconsistencies. This is attributable, in some degree, to operating three different phonics approaches in different year groups. You have already acted to resolve this.
- A further focus for the inspection was to review the impact of the school's pupil premium funding. I found that disadvantaged pupils across the school are making good progress from their starting points, equal to that of their peers. When this is occasionally not the case, it is attributable to pupils' additional needs. Our shared review of your pupil premium strategy highlighted the lack of measurable targets against which you can evaluate your spending accurately. You immediately sought to improve the quality of your documentation.
- I also wanted to check girls' achievement. Historical assessment information identified a marked decline in girls' outcomes compared with that of boys. I found that you had already identified this as a priority for improvement. Throughout the school year, your regular pupil progress meetings have focused on girls' progress to ensure that any decline in progress is quickly picked up and additional support and intervention provided. Consequently, any differences between girls' and boys' achievement can be linked to pupils' individual and additional learning needs.
- My final line of enquiry was to review pupils' attendance. This is because in recent years attendance has fallen and in 2017 was below the national average.

Too many pupils were regularly absent. You have rightly prioritised improving attendance. Your dedicated support staff work hard to offer support to families to ensure that attendance improves, and this is paying off. While this is heartening, you recognise that you need to maintain your high priority for pupils' good attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recently appointed middle leaders receive the support and training they need to fulfil their roles effectively
- there is a clear approach to the teaching of reading comprehension, including across the wider curriculum, to accelerate pupils' progress in reading further, so that more pupils can achieve the higher standard in key stages 1 and 2.
- they continue to promote pupils' good attendance.

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

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders and middle leaders to discuss aspects of the school's work. You shared your own evaluations of the effectiveness of the school and your improvement plans. We observed reading sessions in all classes. We reviewed pupils' assessment information and work in pupils' books.

I reviewed a range of documents including those relating to safeguarding and attendance, along with reports from the local authority. I talked to pupils about their learning during lessons and more formally at lunchtime. I also heard pupils read.

I took account of 30 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, and 20 free-text commentaries, as well as evidence from the school's own parental consultation. I also met with six members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body and the local authority's leadership development partner.