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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 November 2018

Mrs Rebecca Jewitt
Headteacher
Audlem St James' CofE Primary School
Heathfield Road
Audlem
Crewe
Cheshire
CW3 0HH

Dear Mrs Jewitt

Short inspection of Audlem St James' CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 October 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You have a firm and sincere conviction that every pupil can, and will, succeed. You and your staff ensure that Audlem St James is a school that never stands still or becomes complacent. You have very successfully addressed all the areas for improvement at the last inspection. The teaching of mathematics has improved so that teachers provide problem-solving activities which lead to deeper learning and understanding. Pupils told me how much they enjoy the many opportunities they have to learn outside. You have introduced your 'diving for pearls' strategy in which teachers are working to ensure that there is extra challenge in all subjects across the curriculum.

You have a strong track record of closely evaluating the school's performance, identifying where there are weaker aspects and immediately implementing measures to improve. For example, in 2017, the progress of some pupils in Year 6 in mathematics dropped a little. Your subject leader for mathematics underwent additional training, cascaded this to all other staff, and now mathematics outcomes in Year 6 have returned to well above average.

Similarly, you recognised that outcomes in spelling could be improved. Prompt actions included more regular practice in spelling, weekly spelling challenges and awards for 'spellers of the week'. As a result, pupils' standards in spelling are well above average. You are aware that the outdoor areas for children in the early years are less well resourced than indoors. The building work to provide a canopy to enhance outdoor learning was being constructed during the inspection.

Your highly effective systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning have proved to be successful. Staff told me how much they appreciate the professional development that they receive, which enables them to enhance and improve their skills. Staff at all levels feel consulted, supported and valued. There is absolute consistency across all classes in teachers' approaches to all aspects of learning, including assessment. This high-quality teaching enables most pupils to make strong progress. As a result, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have risen since the previous inspection. The same high expectations for the quality and presentation of pupils' work are evident across all classes. Governors know the school very well and can precisely identify where the school has improved since the last inspection.

The pupils that I spoke to were hugely enthusiastic about their learning. This is summed up by comments from pupils in Year 4, who said, 'We have amazing, exciting lessons.' Pupils are rightly very proud of their school. They know that they have a strong voice in school through the pupil parliament. Pupils are trained to be resilient and to reflect on their learning, and this is evident in daily life in school. The focus of the school is to promote an enjoyment of life-long learning.

I was not able to meet Year 6 pupils during the inspection but looked closely at their books. Their work in science and mathematics is impressive. In writing, their work is of high quality. They have analysed the speeches of Sir Winston Churchill as part of their topic on the Second World War and written moving letters from children who were evacuated.

Parents are almost unanimous in their praise of the school. Parents visiting open morning for Reception appreciated how well their children have settled and how much they had already learned. Year 2 parents spoke about the lovely atmosphere in school and the support and care for vulnerable pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the online survey, parents wrote about 'brilliant progress' and shared their appreciation of the helpful and approachable staff. These views are summed up by one comment, 'I cannot praise every aspect of this school highly enough right from the top and its excellent leadership team to the mid-day assistants' caring nature at lunchtime.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding has the highest priority with staff and governors. You have ensured that all staff are very well trained and are vigilant in noting any signs that a pupil might be at risk in any way. You have created a 'well-being team' consisting of teachers, teaching assistants and pupils, whose role is to consider ways of ensuring

that every pupil is safe and happy and feels nurtured. As part of your safeguarding procedures you conduct an annual review in which pupils from all years have the opportunity to discuss how confident they are in talking to staff, what worries they might have, what they enjoy most in school and how well they are learning. All your staff have a strong focus on resourcefulness and personal reflection. Some staff have done training on mental health first aid.

Pupils I met during the inspection described how they and their peers feel safe in school: 'We don't have any bullies here.' They agree that 'if we have arguments, we just forget about it and start a new day'. Pupils explained the different ways in which they are taught to keep safe. For example, in learning how to keep safe on the roads, they are aware of how many feet are needed before a lorry can stop, once its brakes are applied. They know not to accompany strangers and not to engage with unknown people who might try to befriend them through the internet. The school has 'e-champions' who have been trained at police headquarters in Winsford. These pupils help others to understand the key rules for using the internet and social media safely.

Inspection findings

- I looked at our agreed lines of enquiry. The first one focused on what appeared to be a dip in the outcomes for children in early years. However, you showed me very convincing evidence, including detailed tracking information, which demonstrated that, in some year groups, children start their education with skills and abilities well below what is typical for their age. You and your staff plan a whole range of activities across the curriculum to help these children make faster progress so that they are ready for Year 1. Therefore, while attainment seemed to have decreased at the end of Reception, the rate of the children's progress increased markedly, with over three quarters of them making substantial progress. Your staff have detailed awareness of the needs of every child and their individual progress. When we observed children in Reception they were totally engrossed in different activities following on from their current class reading book, 'The Tiger who came to Tea'. You are aware that the quality of the outdoor learning area is not as rich as indoors. Your prompt actions are already improving this.
- Our second line of enquiry was to look at how you and your staff have been creative in developing a curriculum which is varied, interesting, exciting and which ensures that pupils engage in deeper learning. You and your staff and pupils call this 'diving for pearls'. Pupils in all classes were able to show me examples of their work in greater depth. These included high-quality map work in geography, striking artwork developed from photographs of a tour of Styal Mill and using artefacts to better understand history. In mathematics books, there is a strong focus on problem-solving and explaining. This is further enhanced by pupils using 'maths thinking journals' where they tackle even greater challenges. Teachers help pupils to carefully craft their writing by considering word choice and being conscious of the reader. Pupils are constantly inspired to use ambitious and sophisticated vocabulary. For example, Year 2 pupils were writing powerful descriptions of dragons and listening to Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries' as they

did so. You are currently planning how to ensure that pupils work at greater depth in all subjects within the curriculum so that standards rise even further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new area for outdoor learning in the early years reflects the high-quality learning environment indoors.

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

Yours sincerely

Judith Straw
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and we agreed the key lines of enquiry. I briefly met the deputy headteacher. I met with all the staff at morning briefing, and with a group of staff later in the day. I also met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. During the inspection, pupils in Years 5 and 6 were on a residential visit to Stratford with their teachers and three teaching assistants. I therefore met six pupils from Year 4. I reviewed the 35 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 14 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. I had the opportunity to talk to parents of children in Reception class, who had been invited to an open morning for the first hour of the day, and with parents of pupils in Year 2 who were invited to lunch that day. I spoke to a representative of the local authority and the school's leadership partner on the telephone. Together we looked at work in pupils' books in a wide range of subjects. We also visited classes in the early years and both key stages to observe pupils learning. I spoke to pupils during lessons and at playtime and observed their behaviour. I reviewed a range of documents, including an evaluation of the school's performance and information about pupils' progress and attendance. I looked closely at the school's safeguarding and welfare arrangements, including policies and other documentation and discussed these with the safeguarding lead, the chair of governors and with pupils.