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26 November 2018

Mrs Sarah Rubin
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Rubin

Short inspection of St John's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 November 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is led with vision, drive and conviction. You, your senior team and all your staff are dedicated to ensuring that all pupils achieve well and improve their life chances. You know well the community you serve and are respected in turn. Parents remarked that: 'St John's is a fantastic community where the children learn not only academic subjects but also strategies to support their own well-being. St John's holds a strong focus on inclusion and the children seem very respectful of other cultures, religions, race and ethnicity.' This emphasis on equality is exemplified by the high profile of the 'no outsiders' policy around the school. It is embraced well by all adults and pupils.

Staff work together as a team to support pupils' learning throughout the school. They are motivated by the changes you are making to ensure that the curriculum is more relevant and interesting. They feel well supported and identified how you are working hard to improve their well-being by, for example, reducing the workload imposed by frequent assessment and marking. The teaching team is a close knit, supportive community in which every individual feels valued. Morale is high.

You know your school well and you demonstrated an honest and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas in need of further work. Governors are fully supportive of your work and are equally adept at holding you to account. Since the inspection in 2014, they have become more actively involved in the everyday life of the school. They have a realistic understanding of what is being achieved and what still needs to be done. As a governing body, they are constantly

looking at how to better themselves by ensuring that they access training to meet their needs and to make sure they are up to date with current practice.

You are right to prioritise the development of leadership at all levels as part of your drive towards more corporate responsibility. To this end, the development of subject leaders is a key focus of your efforts. School leaders, at all levels, feel well supported and enfranchised. You acknowledge that this is still a work in progress and you continue to encourage initiatives involving both staff and pupils. For example, pupils are asked for their input as your subject leaders design a new curriculum. Equally, you supported initiatives to improve the teaching of phonics, with the resultant outcomes leading to 93% of Year 1 pupils meeting the expected standard in 2018.

A strong focus on reading over the last two years has led to recent improvement. You have used a range of imaginative approaches to develop pupils' skills in, and their love of, reading across the school. Parents have been encouraged to attend workshops, reading awards have stimulated interest, reading slumber parties have roused curiosity and guided-reading methodology has been reviewed and altered. This effort has been worth it as progress has been stronger and attainment in reading in key stage 2 in 2018 rose above the national average. You have correctly identified that there is more work to be done to ensure that more pupils, across all classes, reach greater depth in their reading, writing and mathematics, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The inclusive nature of your school means that you have a very high proportion of pupils with SEND. This is, in part, due to the school's good reputation with parents and external agencies in the local area for effectively supporting pupils with SEND. Many of these pupils have behavioural issues. Generally, you deal well with the behaviour of these pupils using a range of strategies, including a therapy dog, which meet their individual needs and requirements.

The greater majority of parents are complimentary about the school. Pupils I talked to, and those that completed the online survey, were equally positive about the school and stated how they felt part of 'one happy family'.

Since the last inspection, the school has seen a significant growth in numbers and has expanded from one-form to two-form entry. The school now occupies a split site. This initially caused some disruption. In addition, there have been some significant staffing changes. These changes have had a negative impact on how well you have gained the improvements needed as identified in the last inspection report. You were asked to improve challenge for the most able pupils. The progress and attainment of these pupils have improved but the level of challenge could be greater, especially in subjects such as science, history and geography.

Poor attendance continues to be a thorny issue within the school. In particular, it continues to have a negative impact on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are regularly updated, checked and meticulously kept. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders are trained in safer recruitment practices and make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. Staff and governors regularly receive up-to-date training on a range of safeguarding issues. Safeguarding responsibilities are taken seriously by all adults working in the school, who are highly attentive to pupils' welfare needs. Concerns over pupils' welfare are pursued vigorously and close links are established with families and external agencies. Any safeguarding issues are followed up rapidly and tenaciously.

Most pupils said they feel safe in school and their parents agreed. A minority did express some concerns over behaviour and aspects of bullying. However, they had confidence that their teachers are good at resolving instances of conflict. They trust adults in the school and are comfortable in approaching them should they have any worries or concerns.

Inspection findings

- Under your direction, staff have worked hard to improve achievement, especially in reading and writing across the school. After a somewhat slow start, the efforts of the teachers are beginning to bear fruit with standards in reading and writing in 2018 at the end of key stage 2 above the national average.
- A relatively high proportion of children start school in the early years with limited knowledge and skills, especially in language and communication. Most make good progress and there is a consistent upward trend in outcomes. The proportion of those reaching a good level of development was above the national average in 2018.
- Phonics became a real success story, with 93% of Year 1 pupils achieving the expected standard in 2018. This was well above the national average.
- Improvements across key stage 1 are more fragile. Although the proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average, working at greater depth is still proving elusive.
- Although outcomes for the school as a whole are impressive, given previous results, you rightly identified that these will need to be sustained and built on over the coming years. You are aware that not enough pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged or the most able, fail to achieve to a greater depth. Our observation of lessons revealed that there are still inconsistencies in teaching and learning across classes. In some, pupils are being challenged. In others, the tasks are not always set at an appropriate level to enable pupils, especially the most able, to respond in greater depth.
- You have made the improvement of provision in science, history and geography a priority. This continues to be a work in progress. These subjects are being taught

regularly but you recognise that further training is needed for teachers to develop their expertise to enable them to teach these subjects more effectively. My discussions with pupils, and our joint scrutiny of their work in these subjects, identified that learning can be fragmented and shallow.

- The support for pupils with SEND is well managed. Pupils experience a strong nurturing approach from staff attached to individuals and groups. Teaching assistants use their knowledge of the pupils they work with, alongside the positive relationships that they have established, to support pupils in developing personal coping strategies. Pupils' support plans provide staff with a clear picture of the specific needs of each individual. Although the nurture side of provision is strong, the academic progress that these pupils make, although improving, is not yet consistently well targeted.
- Poor attendance remains an issue. The poor attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND is especially problematic and is a contributory factor to the weaker achievement of these groups. Absence is followed up immediately and you are continually looking at fresh strategies to engage with hard-to-reach families. Nurture breakfasts are offered to entice pupils; weekly awards and class incentives are proving popular and pick-ups are provided for persistent absentees. These strategies are having some limited impact, but, despite this, the school is still trying to combat a culture of poor attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to develop strategies which will enable all pupils, but particularly those who are disadvantaged or those with SEND, to enable them to make better progress and reach higher standards across a broad range of subjects
- senior leaders improve pupils' attendance by continuing to explore alternative approaches to engage with families, especially those who are hard to reach.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, members of your staff and pupils from several classes. In addition, I had a brief conversation with a representative from the local authority. I also held a telephone discussion with the chair of the governing body. Before and after school, I was able to talk with a number of parents as they accompanied their children to and from school. You and I visited classrooms on both sites to see the learning that was taking place. We looked at examples of pupils' work in their books. In particular, work in English, science and topic books was scrutinised. A range of documentation was considered, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, the development plan and the school's own assessment information relating to both past and current progress. I took account of 32 responses from parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. Consideration was also given to the Ofsted online questionnaires completed by several staff and pupils.