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Mrs Sixsmith
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sixsmith

Short inspection of St James's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your calm and purposeful leadership makes a strong contribution to the positive direction in which the school is travelling. You work closely with leaders and governors to ensure that the school meets the needs of the community that it serves. St James's C of E Primary is a large school with a small school ethos. Leaders and staff get to know pupils as individuals. Many parents appreciate this approach and also feel that communication is a strength. Comments from parents included, 'Staff always have time for you,' and 'Queries are responded to efficiently, openly, and with thought and professionalism.'

Your school values are central to the warm and caring ethos of the school. Pupils have a deep understanding of kindness, responsibility, honesty, respect, perseverance and friendship. Staff model the values well and you put in place regular opportunities for pupils to learn about the meaning of the values. This positive approach leads to good behaviour and mature attitudes among the pupils. They are considerate of one another and happy.

Leaders and governors articulate a clear understanding of the strengths and priorities for the school. There is a coherent link between your self-evaluation document and your improvement plans. You choose appropriate actions and address them successfully. You and your deputy headteacher make a strong senior

team. Together, you have ensured that other leaders are directly involved in the improvement of teaching. Middle leaders work alongside you, and independently, to carry out checks on the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. Teachers receive precise feedback on how to improve and previous feedback is followed up well. You also provide good opportunities for staff to share their good practice with each other. Consequently, teaching continues to be refined and improved. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the high-quality professional support that they receive.

You have responded well to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Pupils receive high-quality opportunities to write at length. They make good progress in their writing and the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standards has risen. The new approaches to the teaching of handwriting, grammar, punctuation and spelling are having a positive impact. Pupils apply these skills with increasing accuracy to their written work. You recognise that this improvement has not translated fully into the grammar, punctuation and spelling test scores at the end of key stage 2. You have put in place an effective strategy to ensure that pupils have the skills to apply their understanding to a test situation.

Staff respond well to pupils' needs during lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively with particular groups of pupils, or adapt to provide support to individuals who are finding work tricky. Teaching assistants are deployed well and work proactively. Teachers have also ensured that they plan activities that are exciting to spark pupils' interests. For example, a range of visitors have been in to the school and visits have taken place out of school. These experiences enhance learning and are enjoyed by pupils.

Pupils get off to a positive start to their education in the early years and key stage 1. The provision for the two- to four-year-old children in the playgroup and pre-school is effective and nurturing. Teaching in Reception is a strength because learning is exciting and appropriately challenging for the children. In key stage 1, attainment has risen positively over the last two years. The proportion of pupils attaining the expected and higher standards in 2017 was above the national average.

Governors provide a good blend of challenge and support. The chair of governors has been involved with the governing body for 30 years and he provides good leadership. Other governors have a range of skills and are knowledgeable about the school. They use their visits to the school and their meetings to probe leaders on what needs to be improved. Governors are outward-facing and broker external support to validate the quality of education in the school. They use an external consultant to help develop challenging performance management targets for the headteacher. Governors have also worked with leaders to put in place effective school improvement support from the diocese and the local authority. Governors have identified that the pupil premium strategies need to be evaluated for impact more effectively, so that they know exactly which strategies are proving most successful.

Pupils' personal development is extremely well catered for through an array of enrichment opportunities. Pupils thrive on the responsibilities that they are given, such as peer supporters, school councillors, eco-warriors, the worship committee and house captains. One school council member's comment typified pupils' enthusiasm for these activities: 'The school council gave me the opportunity to know what life is like as an adult. We visited the council house, met councillors and the mayor. We also took part in a debate.' You also ensure that pupils go on a range of trips to enhance the curriculum and provide pupils with cultural experiences. For example, Year 5 pupils enjoyed three recent trips, including bell-boating, to a synagogue and to the Thinktank Science Museum. Pupils also appreciate the range of clubs and sports that are on offer at the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are thorough. Several leaders are trained to a senior level and they are meticulous in their work. Staff record concerns about pupils vigilantly and leaders are tenacious when following up these concerns. If referrals to the local authority are required, then they are instigated quickly and effectively. You showed me clear examples where you have challenged the quality of support from external services, so that pupils are kept as safe as possible. You and your safeguarding leads provide regular and relevant training for staff. As part of this training, staff discuss safeguarding scenarios, so that they are prepared for different eventualities. The culture for safeguarding is strong because staff are clear about their responsibilities.

You have made sure that pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. This is achieved through regular assemblies on safety and through lessons in the curriculum. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about the dangers of the internet and the importance of not sharing personal information online. Pupils are clear about the meaning of the word 'bullying' and know where to seek help if they are concerned about something. Older pupils sometimes support younger pupils in the school through a peer mentoring programme. Several parents commented on the positive impact that this programme has had on their child.

Inspection findings

- Your school improvement plan places an appropriate focus on raising attainment in key stage 2. Your actions so far have been successful, although there is still some work to do. You have ensured that staff have a better understanding of the demands of the curriculum in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, the proportions achieving the expected and higher standards improved when compared to the proportions achieved in 2016. It is important to note that, in 2017, some significant and unforeseen attendance issues had an adverse effect on the published test results for the school. Pupils make good progress on their journey through key stage 2. However, sometimes the level of challenge that pupils receive in their learning in reading, mathematics and in grammar, punctuation and spelling is not consistently high. Further work needs to be done here, so that attainment continues to rise.

- Pupils are motivated to read widely and often. This is a direct consequence of the thoughtful reading strategies that have been put in place. Pupils enjoy discussing and debating what is happening in their whole-class book. Teachers set increasingly challenging tasks in reading, so that pupils receive opportunities to practise their comprehension skills. Pupils are proud of their individual reading records. The records demonstrate that most pupils read regularly at home and at school. Your reward system sets pupils a target of reading books from a range of authors. Pupils enjoy this challenge and know which authors they prefer.
- We looked at the spending and impact of pupil premium funding. Leaders and staff put in place a range of successful interventions for disadvantaged pupils. You carefully map the individual support that pupils receive and the progress that they make. The vast majority of disadvantaged pupils make good progress. You provided convincing assessment information to show that in certain year groups there are an increasing number of disadvantaged pupils achieving the higher standards for their age. There has been an increase in the number of children who are looked after in recent years. Your care and support for these pupils are excellent. While leaders have a good understanding of the impact of pupil premium strategies for individual pupils, the overall evaluation in the school's pupil premium plan is not as strong. A more thorough overall evaluation will enable leaders and governors to have an even deeper understanding of which strategies are proving most successful.
- In 2016, the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils were in the bottom 10% of all schools nationally. Your procedures for monitoring attendance levels are very thorough. You are proactive and quick to address absence that falls below an acceptable level. The parent liaison coordinator and the office staff work closely with you to improve attendance. Strategies are successful. In the academic year 2016/17, and so far this academic year, attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils have risen.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they evaluate the impact of pupil premium spending more effectively, so that they have a deeper understanding of the most successful strategies
- teaching in key stage 2 is consistently challenging, so that attainment continues to rise in reading, mathematics and in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Meckin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your deputy headteacher. I also met with four governors. I spoke to pupils informally and formally. I made short visits to eight lessons with you and looked at a range of pupils' books. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered 132 free-text responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also considered the responses from the online questionnaire completed by pupils and staff.

I scrutinised various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan and the documents that you use to check the quality of teaching. You shared with me the most recent assessments of pupils' attainment and progress. We discussed the national test results and assessments undertaken by pupils in 2016 and 2017. I also looked at the school's published information on the website, as well as minutes of governing body meetings and information about attendance, behaviour and safety.