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Christine Killip
Headteacher
Whitwick St John The Baptist Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Killip

Short inspection of Whitwick St John The Baptist Church of England 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 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.

Staff work closely together, sharing expertise and learning from each other, to ensure that pupils are taught well and cared for. Staff told me that they feel proud to work at your school and want all pupils to achieve their potential. You give staff good professional development opportunities so that they can continue to improve their skills. You also take due account of their well-being and their work-life balance.

You have ensured that the curriculum is engaging and exciting for pupils. Those I met during my visit explained to me that they like coming to school to learn, because teachers make lessons fun. Attendance is in line with the national average. The school is a happy and harmonious learning environment. Classrooms are places where pupils listen attentively to staff, work hard and cooperate happily with each other. They behave sensibly around the school and are polite to visitors.

Children settle in quickly and make good gains in the pre-school provision. I saw two-year-olds working and playing alongside their older peers and learning new skills. Some children were learning how to tidy up using a dustpan and brush, while others were making a collage of sea creatures or balancing on the outdoor equipment. Staff in the pre-school set a good example when they speak, and they

ask questions that interest the children and give them appropriate choices. This helps to develop children's communication well.

You and your staff have successfully addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Teachers use a consistently effective approach when teaching mathematics. Pupils' books show that they can apply their mathematical knowledge to solve real-life problems. Recently, pupils across the school took part in a fund-raising activity, in which they baked different types of bread. Wall displays show how pupils in Year 4 converted 6,780g to 6.78kg, while pupils in Reception made posters advertising their banana bread for 50p. Teachers in Year 1 and Year 2 ensure that pupils continue to make good progress in mathematics once they leave the early years. Staff give pupils regular work to do to improve the speed at which pupils can calculate mentally by asking them to write multiplication and division sums that make 20 using different integers. Staff also set exercises to check that pupils are becoming proficient in mental arithmetic. In addition, teachers across the school have sufficiently high expectations of the most able pupils and challenge them across different subjects. These pupils say that work is difficult for them. The proportions in almost all year groups who are currently on track to reach a greater depth of understanding by the end of key stages 1 and 2 are at least broadly in line with the 2017 national averages.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and do not hesitate to report any concerns. They are knowledgeable because they have received training that includes areas of recent national concern, such as extremism. They are vigilant for the many warning signs of the different forms of child abuse. You keep clear records of any concerns and are unafraid to make referrals to external agencies if this is needed. An overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View believe that staff keep their children safe. Pupils I met told me how pupils are well behaved and that bullying and name-calling are rare. If bullying happens, they know that staff will deal with it both quickly and fairly. They are happy to approach a member of staff if they feel worried about anything. Pupils particularly like the 'worry boxes' that you provide for them as an alternative to reporting any concern personally.

Pupils are taught effectively about a range of risks to their safety, such as the potential dangers of roads and strangers. Pupils are taught to swim and those in Year 6 are shown how to cycle proficiently. Pupils are also taught about the risks of new technology, such as the internet and mobile phones. Your staff teach them never to give their personal details online, or to respond to a message from someone they do not know personally.

Inspection findings

- On this inspection, I investigated why the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been lower, over time, than that seen in other schools nationally. I also looked into why progress

in reading was below average in key stage 2 in 2017, and I explored the reasons for the increase in the rate of persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils in the last academic year.

- You are aware that not enough pupils have a secure knowledge of phonics by the time they leave Year 1. Although children in the early years make good gains across most of the areas of learning, too many children, around four in ten, leave the early years without knowing enough letter sounds. This is because staff in the early years do not consistently ensure that those children who need to catch up do so. Too few children begin Year 1 with a secure knowledge of phonics.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has been below the national average for three years. Strong teaching in Year 1 this year has meant that pupils are learning well. Staff identify precisely which sounds pupils do not know and teach these effectively. I saw pupils reading aloud words such as 'frighten' and 'midnight' and spelling words such as 'bike' independently. The proportion of pupils currently in Year 1 who are expected to attain a level of phonics knowledge appropriate to their age by the end of this academic year is set to be much closer to the national average.
- Last year, progress in reading at the end of key stage 2 was in the lowest 20% of schools nationally, and attainment was below the national average at the end of both key stages 1 and 2. You noted that although pupils were not doing as well in reading as they were in other subjects, they could talk to you, and answer your questions, about the books they were reading. However, their written answers were weaker and often they did not complete the books they had started to read.
- You and your staff have worked together very successfully to bring rapid improvement. Staff have improved their approach to the teaching of reading. This includes planning much more effective comprehension activities. Pupils' books show that they are now considerably better at explaining their answers in writing. Their ability to infer meaning from texts is good.
- New books and wall displays, along with strong a celebration of reading, have also raised the profile of reading throughout the school. Pupils are much more enthusiastic about reading. They now finish reading the books they start. Pupils in Year 6 were particularly keen to tell me how much they enjoyed meeting professional authors such as Stewart Foster. They were very excited that authors are responding personally to their online messages. Pupils throughout the school are now making good progress. Almost every pupil I met from many different year groups told me that they liked reading and read frequently at home.
- My observations, pupils' exercise books and the information that you collect about pupils' achievement confirm that pupils' overall progress is good and that good proportions across almost all year groups are attaining well. You are ensuring that teaching is consistently good across the school so that the pupils improve their skills quickly.
- You noticed that, last year, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who were persistently absent from school was much higher than the national average. This was due to an unusually high number of genuine external circumstances. The

family support worker works closely with any families whose children do not attend school often enough in order to ensure that the attendance of these pupils improves. This year, the rate of persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils has reduced considerably and is now much closer to the national average.

Next step for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a very large majority of children leave the early years with phonics knowledge that is secure for their age.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with the chair of the governing body, the deputy headteacher, the subject leader for English and the lead teacher for phonics and for the early years. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and all free-text comments. I met with staff to discuss their views of their role, and of senior leadership. We visited classes together throughout the school and I looked at many samples of pupils' work. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and met with a large group of them in the morning. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and its plans for further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.