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Miss Shirleyann Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Jones

Short inspection of St James' CofE Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide strong and effective leadership and have set a clear vision that has contributed to improving the school. You have continued to cultivate a school in which pupils are happy, parents and carers are supportive and to which staff are proud to belong. You and your senior leaders have instilled a strong sense of teamwork among staff and together you ensure that there is a clear focus on raising pupils' achievement.

During this inspection, we discussed your processes for evaluating the school's effectiveness. You receive very good support from your school improvement partner, whose incisive reports complement your own analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of provision. This means that you have an accurate view of the school on which to base your plans for improvement.

Leaders recognised that Year 6 pupils' performance dipped in 2016, with weaker than expected results in reading and middle-attaining pupils making slower progress than other groups. You have taken prompt action to tackle these issues. You recognise that there is more to be done to ensure that careful checks are kept on the progress, from respective starting points, of all groups of pupils.

Around the school and in classrooms, pupils behave well, care about each other and feel safe. They are polite and friendly, and enjoy talking about their learning. Pupils are rightly proud of their school and are excellent ambassadors. Across the school, pupils hold a variety of roles and enjoy the responsibility these offer. These include the 'playground squad', mediators and 'read to me leaders', who listen to younger pupils reading and give them helpful feedback.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They use their knowledge and expertise well to support and challenge you and other leaders to continue to raise standards. They visit the school regularly to evaluate its effectiveness and monitor safeguarding arrangements.

You have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement that were identified at the previous inspection. Pupils of different abilities are now provided with learning tasks that are better matched to their needs. They also have frequent opportunities to work independently to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Teachers explain clearly to pupils how they can improve their work. The real-life application of mathematics has been addressed and you continue to refine mathematics teaching and learning to improve pupils' outcomes, with a current focus on the development of pupils' mathematical reasoning skills. Nevertheless, further work is necessary to ensure that all pupils, in particular the most able, are routinely stretched in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The designated safeguarding leader has ensured that all staff, including those who join the school mid-year, understand the school's safeguarding policy and new legislation. Referrals made by staff indicate that they are well informed about different aspects of safeguarding. The designated safeguarding leader acts swiftly to address concerns, as seen in her detailed records. Leaders work effectively with a range of external agencies, including the local authority, to ensure that pupils are helped to keep safe.

Pupils are confident that the school is a safe place and told me that they can speak with any member of staff if they have worries. They told me that bullying does not happen because everyone is friendly and 'the teachers will stop it'. Parents are also confident that their children are safe and well looked after. There are secure systems for checking and recording the suitability of adults, before they are allowed to work with pupils.

Inspection findings

- For my first line of enquiry, I considered the impact of leaders' action to improve pupils' outcomes in reading after a dip in the attainment of Year 6 pupils, particularly girls, in 2016. Leaders have quickly put in place a range of effective measures to ensure that standards rise again. You have analysed the assessment information for girls who took the national tests in reading in 2016 and have

tracked the progress of girls currently in the school. You have found that girls' progress is now equal to, or better than, that of boys. In school, girls read confidently and fluently and respond to teachers' questions that call for prediction, inference and deduction.

- Leaders identified that limitations in pupils' understanding of what they were reading prevented a greater proportion of pupils from meeting the expected standard in the 2016 statutory test. As a result, you have ensured that teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their comprehension skills and broaden their vocabulary. The daily reading time is working well. Teachers use this time effectively to work with pupils to challenge their understanding. During the inspection, pupils explained to me how they look out for new vocabulary in these sessions and share it with the class. Pupils struggling with their reading are closely monitored and are also supported by extra adults in these sessions. You acknowledge that you need to continue to build on and refine the teaching of reading to maximise pupils' rates of progress.
- For my second line of enquiry, I evaluated pupils' progress in mathematics and the progress of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Revisions to the mathematics curriculum and staff training have improved the teaching of mathematics this year. There is now well-planned coverage of key concepts, although more needs to be done to promote reasoning and problem-solving skills. Pupils say that they are learning more and understanding it better.
- School assessment information shows that pupils, including the disadvantaged group, are currently making stronger progress in mathematics. However, some pupils feel that they could be challenged even further. This is in line with your own view that more pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, need to reach the higher standard in mathematics.
- Finally, I explored why persistent absence rates for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have been high, as shown by the most recently published attendance figures. Scrutiny of individual case studies clearly showed that there were circumstances that made absenteeism unavoidable. You keep a close eye on the attendance of all pupils and are well supported in this by the attendance officer, who helps you follow up any issues or concerns you may have. You have a wide range of rewards that are effective in encouraging pupils to aspire to high attendance. You are in close communication with parents of children whose attendance is not as good as it could be and are providing effective support to improve this situation.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent dip in reading outcomes is reversed and all pupils achieve to the very best of their capabilities in this subject
- the teaching of mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills is strengthened so that all groups of pupils, including the most able, are routinely challenged in their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Thomas
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the school leadership team, the office and finance manager, the attendance officer and designated safeguarding lead. I met one member of the governing body and spoke on the phone to your chair of governors. I met with the school improvement adviser who represented the local authority.

I visited classes from Year 3 to Year 6 with you, your deputy headteacher and the assistant headteachers to observe pupils' learning and look at examples of their work. I spoke to pupils in their classrooms, listened to pupils read and spoke to six pupils from across the school to find out what they thought about the school.

I evaluated recent information showing pupils' progress. Records about keeping pupils safe were evaluated. I also scrutinised the school's analysis of its attendance records. I took account of 34 responses to the Parent View questionnaire, Ofsted's online survey, as well as the school's own surveys from pupils and parents.