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6 September 2017

Mr John Tutt
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tutt

Short inspection of St James' Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 18 July 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 June 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 continue to demonstrate high levels of commitment to the pupils of St James' Junior School. You are determined that the school continues to thrive by moving forward and going from strength to strength. You are excited by the opportunities for even closer collaboration with the infant school that will be provided by your executive headship there next year. You have created strong links with other local schools which benefit both leaders and pupils.

Improvement actions address the right things at the right times. This is because of detailed and carefully considered school self-evaluation. Despite high levels of pupils' attainment, you and your team are not complacent. You work swiftly and effectively to address any occasional dips in performance. For example, following a recent drop in mathematics outcomes in 2016 for some groups of pupils, leaders acted promptly, purchasing new resources and instigating staff training. Consequently, standards have risen quickly and strongly.

This is a school where pupils develop confidence and self-belief. Pupils talk excitedly about the range of activities on offer, their enjoyment of learning and the support their teachers give them. Pupils radiate confidence in both learning well and the adults who care for them. As one explained, 'it's very encouraging, no one is going to put you down, they help you to be a better person'. Parents, too, have very positive views, with most recommending the school. They speak highly of your leadership and 'wonderful manner with the children'. One parent commented about

her daughter, 'She has loved every single year at the school. In Year 6 she has gone from strength to strength in confidence in all aspects of school life.' Pupils are well mannered, thoughtful and conduct themselves extremely well around the school. Another parent encapsulated the views of many when they stated, 'Hats off to St James's Juniors, they are doing a grand job!'

You have maintained the strengths identified during the last inspection. Pupils' attainment overall is above that seen nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points and in 2016 attained levels in line with or above national levels in reading and writing. While levels of attainment are high in writing, you acknowledge that these could be further strengthened by ensuring that expectations of writing across the curriculum are consistently high throughout the school.

You have also addressed the areas for improvement that inspectors identified previously. Subject leaders are highly effective in leading their subjects, both within school and across the wider locality group. As a result, recent helpful initiatives in mathematics are embedded, supporting teachers and accelerating pupils' progress. The most able pupils attain well. In 2016, proportions of pupils who attained higher levels matched national levels in writing, and exceeded them in reading and mathematics. Pupils enjoy the challenges presented to them. They told me they 'like the hard stuff' and the 'freedom to shape your ideas'. Information and communication technology resources are used effectively and regularly across the school to access and enhance learning. Pupils' books show that punctuation skills are well developed. In 2016, attainment in spelling, punctuation and grammar was above national levels at both expected and higher levels. Nevertheless, you rightly recognise that the presentation of pupils' work sometimes lacks care, especially in topic work.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Record-keeping, including employment checks, is meticulous. Staff receive regular training and are alert to the signs that might suggest a concern about a pupil's well-being or safety. Governors make regular checks for themselves, satisfying themselves that procedures are clearly understood and consistent across the school.

Pupils have confidence in leaders and staff. They told me that school is a 'safe and friendly place', and that 'we can rely on adults to help'. They have an excellent knowledge of how to keep themselves safe, and the confidence to do so, but trust adults to sort things out quickly and effectively if the need arises. They have a mature understanding of how to keep themselves safe online, including being alert to the dangers of cyber bullying.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: leaders' effectiveness in safeguarding pupils and raising attendance, the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the progress of the most able pupils, the effectiveness of the teaching of mathematics and how well leaders inform parents about pupils' progress.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective. As a result, pupils are making good progress from their starting points. Pupils' needs are appropriately identified. Provision is well planned, incorporating advice from other agencies, and regularly reviewed. In classrooms, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively by kind, highly skilled adults and appropriate resources. Additional small-group work prepares pupils well for classroom work. Relationships are warm and encouraging. As a result, pupils thrive and confidence is high. Pupils know that their talents are valued and celebrated. For example, a pupil shared his talent for piano, playing 'Moonlight Sonata' with enjoyment, precision and flair. Most parents agree that needs are met well. One parent noted, 'Our son needs a lot of input and attention to thrive, and he has received just that.'
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, make good progress from the school's own baseline assessments. This is reflected in the work seen in the books of the most able pupils, which shows good progress over time. Regular opportunities to develop mathematical reasoning, and extension groups in mathematics, have ensured that the most able pupils have the challenge that they need to progress. Pupils are articulate because vocabulary is developed well. The most able pupils are highly proficient readers. This transfers into their writing so that phrases are rich, and creative writing is evocative and effective. In Year 6, expectations of writing and mathematics are high across the curriculum. Pupils routinely rehearse, apply and develop these skills alongside the acquisition of the skills, knowledge and understanding required by specific subjects. However, expectations for pupils' writing are not consistently high across all subjects in other year groups. This means that the most able writers do not routinely apply and develop their writing skills in subjects such as science.
- Mathematics is taught effectively. Governors and leaders responded swiftly to the dip in achievement of middle-attaining pupils in 2016. Actions to address this have been effective. Provisional results for 2017 indicate improved outcomes at both expected and higher standards. Pupils' books show regular opportunities to develop and apply mathematical skills, reasoning and investigations. Pupils are adept at recording their findings. For example, pupils in Year 4 could record temperatures at different times of day on a graph then ask and answer questions about the information.
- Most parents agree that they are well informed about the progress that their children are making. However, some parents would like more information. Governors have spoken to parents about this during regular parent forums. Some parents preferred the national level system and find the new national assessment processes 'too broad'. Through regular parent consultation and letters, leaders take care to inform parents about progress and to help them to support their

children. Homework is regular and varied. Pupils say they enjoy homework because, 'it is nice to do', 'it's not too hard' and 'it is focused on your topic and an opportunity to show off your work'.

- Attendance is rising and is now higher than that seen nationally. In recent times, there have been marked improvements to the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Pupils say they enjoy attending school immensely because 'the teachers are nice and the topics are fun'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- consistently high expectations of writing are further developed across the wider curriculum
- expectations of presentation of pupils' work are consistently high across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Gordon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy and three other school leaders. I spoke to a representative of the local authority, and met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I visited all classes and a small support group jointly with you and your deputy. We observed learning, talked to pupils and looked at the work in their books. I met with a group of pupils and observed pupils as they moved around the school. I analysed a range of school documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school self-evaluation and improvement plan, safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I considered the 78 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 32 free-text responses. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the day.