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Helen Atkinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Atkinson

Short inspection of St Swithun's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead the school well and are ambitious for St Swithun's to become outstanding. You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and are determined to continue making it even better. Discussions with parents revealed their confidence in your leadership and an appreciation of the dedicated work of the wider staff.

Yours is a friendly and happy school where pupils feel valued, enjoy learning and make good progress. Well-planned lessons enable pupils to learn and apply new skills thoroughly in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are prepared to discuss challenging ideas and they enjoy the work set that stretches their abilities. They find their topics interesting and are proud of their many achievements. Your staff go out of their way to ensure that individual pupils are supported well. Teachers give quality discussion time to every pupil, which helps them to understand what they do well and how to improve. Pupils particularly appreciate the many visits that support their learning. Key stage 1 and 2 pupils enjoyed an autumn visit to the Ashmolean Museum, which generated high-quality art in response to the study of famous paintings. Year 6 pupils talked enthusiastically about the challenging activities of a very recent residential field trip. Parents of younger pupils particularly welcome their weekly newsletter because it helps them to give relevant support at home.

You and your leaders know the school well. I saw during the inspection that the actions you take are helping to improve pupils' learning and progress. You use performance information effectively to tackle those aspects of the school that you identify as being weaker. You are taking effective steps to ensure all groups of pupils make good progress from their starting points. Staff support your drive for continuous improvement, with one summing it up by saying that 'complacency is not a word that would be tolerated by anyone'.

Since the last inspection, governors have strengthened their arrangements to ensure you are held to account. Governors are knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities and regularly attend training. They use information skilfully to ask challenging questions and they carefully monitor the impact of strategies you have implemented to assess the school's improvement.

Since your appointment as headteacher you have worked with staff to select whole-school approaches to reading, writing and mathematics. These have led to improved outcomes for most groups of pupils. You have increased the expectations of teaching and learning and you regularly monitor that these are met. Staff appreciate the support and challenge that you and your leaders give, which enable them to flourish as professionals. You have followed up effectively a recommendation from the previous inspection to improve pupils' spelling. The 2016 spelling outcomes were at the national average and current assessment information indicates a higher score in 2017. I saw in the work of key stage 2 pupils that they are adept at correcting spelling errors.

Pupils' progress in reading was in the top 10% of all schools nationally in 2016, while progress in writing and mathematics was at the national average. Evidence seen during the inspection supports leaders' analysis that pupils' progress is improving in mathematics across the school. The steps you have taken to improve pupils' progress in writing are much more recent. Consequently, your actions are having an impact for most groups of pupils, though not all. Some groups of pupils do not make as much progress in writing as they should.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to ensure pupils understand more about life and cultures in other parts of Britain. You have taken effective action to ensure pupils develop their understanding about equalities and about life in modern Britain. Older pupils explained clearly to me that it is a person's character that matters and not any difference of race, religion, disability or gender. Parents from non-Christian faith groups praise the school for accommodating their specific needs, while recognising the school's Christian values and ethos.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are diligently maintained and of high quality. An effective safeguarding and welfare team takes appropriate action where there is any concern about a pupil's welfare. Leaders do not hesitate to press external agencies for their involvement where it is needed. Governors understand their responsibilities and strongly support your aim that 'the school puts pupils' safety first'. You have

ensured that all staff are appropriately trained for and understand their safeguarding role.

Parents and pupils report that the school is a safe place to be. Pupils appreciate the fact that staff are always on hand and are clearly visible during breaktimes. They say there are very few incidents of any kind, including bullying. Pupils know how to report a concern and trust staff to address it quickly and effectively. Older pupils understand about different sorts of bullying and the effect it has on victims. They realise the importance of treating others with kindness and consideration, and they respect difference and diversity. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves and others safe and healthy both within school and beyond.

Inspection findings

During this inspection, I focused on: the actions leaders are taking to improve pupils' writing; how well the school meets the needs of the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils; and how effectively leaders' actions enable more pupils to make better than expected progress in writing and in mathematics.

- Senior leaders and governors know it is a priority to improve pupils' outcomes in writing. Almost all pupils enter the school at levels broadly typical for their age and they make good progress in learning by the end of Reception. A carefully planned approach has been taken to ensure pupils achieve well in phonics at the end of Year 1. The progress younger pupils make in phonics and reading is now supporting them to write more fluently.
- You have put actions in place to ensure that the teaching of writing is consistently good. You agreed with me that these actions will need rigorous follow-up to check the progress of different groups of pupils from their starting points. You are aware that your subject leaders need support to refine their monitoring skills.
- You and your governors are passionate that the school's relatively small number of disadvantaged pupils should achieve well. Governors share your ambition to ensure disadvantaged pupils' experiences are enriched by the school, so they can achieve their very best. Currently, too few of these pupils are making better than expected progress to reach the higher levels of achievement. Leaders rightly explored what other schools do to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Their findings are being used effectively to improve teachers' work with disadvantaged pupils in order to raise standards. You continue to review the difference that this additional support makes.
- You have recently implemented new ways of teaching and learning mathematics. Your improvement actions for mathematics began in key stage 1 and have already had an impact. At the end of 2016, outcomes in key stage 1 were above the national average and, on the basis of teachers' current assessments, you expect them to be higher in 2017. Your approach to mathematics is now in place in both key stages. We saw in lessons that pupils regularly practice what they have been taught and they work with others to apply new concepts and explore methods. Teachers give pupils lots of time in lessons to talk about mathematics.

They ask questions that are carefully matched to pupils' abilities and encourage them to explain their thinking. Pupils are confident to attempt challenging mathematical problems because teachers support them to take risks and learn from mistakes.

- Leaders have enhanced the ways in which teachers assess pupils' learning and there is increasingly detailed tracking of progress. Timely and accurate assessments support your teachers to have high expectations. Effective assessment also enables detailed planning for individual pupils.
- Your current information supports the view that overall progress is improving in mathematics and writing, in spite of pupils' starting points being higher on entry to key stages than is typical. The leadership team is determined to continue improving the school so that more pupils reach higher standards and fewer pupils are below age-expectation. Leaders have made some important improvements that are very recent. You are aware that you need to review the impact of these for different groups of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing continues to improve from individual starting points
- more disadvantaged pupils make better than expected progress to reach their full potential
- subject leaders' work has an increasing impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Yours sincerely

Linda Jacobs
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited your school for one day. I held meetings with you, your leaders, your chair of governors and three other governors. I spoke on the telephone to a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including policies, pupil progress information, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and development planning, and minutes of governing body meetings. I visited almost all classes with you to see teaching and learning. I talked informally with pupils, as well as listening to pupils read. I looked at pupils' work in lessons and also with leaders. I analysed 27 staff responses to Ofsted's survey and 167 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey and accompanying free text responses. The views of parents I spoke to informally at the beginning and end of the school day were also taken into account.