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Mrs Tracey Caffrey
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Caffrey

Short inspection of St John's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 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 February 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 ambition for every pupil to enjoy learning and be successful, and your team's firm commitment to this vision, is demonstrated in the good progress pupils make across the curriculum. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the learning experiences they have and the care they are given. They are proud of their work and their school. Parents praise you and your team highly for the many opportunities you provide their children, including extra-curricular clubs, and your close attention to the needs of each individual child.

You and your team have continued to build on the good quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics with a curriculum that develops pupils' knowledge through carefully crafted learning experiences. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has continued to rise. Provisional 2018 results show that this is now similar to the national average in reading, and better in writing and mathematics. Your direction to ensure that the most able pupils are fully supported in making strong progress is paying off. The proportion of pupils reaching a higher standard by the time they leave school is increasing. Your evaluations show that you still have more work to do to ensure that the most able pupils in all year groups make similarly strong progress.

During the last inspection, you were tasked with further improving the quality of teaching in mathematics and fostering a greater enjoyment of reading. Your

focused analysis and evaluation of pupils' work in English and mathematics, and the resulting actions for improvement you have taken, have brought positive gains for pupils in these subjects.

Your leaders say that 'reading is at the heart of everything' in your school. From the dedication given to phonics teaching right from the start, to leaders' intentions to build pupils' knowledge through a wide range of high-quality fiction and non-fiction texts, this is apparent. Your carefully considered investment in training and resources, used in school and at home, has enabled pupils to read well and with enjoyment. You acknowledge that helping pupils who struggle with reading to keep up from the very beginning continues to be a priority.

In mathematics, current pupils are making good progress. All pupils learn and practise new skills so that they are secure, before applying them to problem-solving tasks. They use resources confidently to support their answers. Leaders told me that the school's attention to broadening pupils' vocabulary in English is helping them to reason more effectively in mathematics. I saw and heard evidence of this in lessons. Careful direction from teachers and teaching assistants that challenges the most able pupils is resulting in an increasing proportion of pupils reaching higher standards by the time they leave the school.

You are keen to make sure that your team understands the need to constantly adapt the school provision to meet the changing needs of the community. Your team responds quickly to support the large proportion of pupils who come new to the school throughout the year, and those who have English as an additional language. You work closely and successfully with the pre-school. You rightly recognise that while a substantial proportion of children enter early years with skills that are lower than typical for their age, attainment on entry is improving. Far fewer children have starting points which are well below typical for their age than was seen historically.

The early years team members make sure that children get off to a strong start. Adults are unafraid to teach young children the basic skills they need to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the time children spend in child-initiated activities does not consistently help them to move forward in, or consolidate, their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the parent support adviser have developed a well-embedded culture of safeguarding within the school. You have ensured that everyone knows their role and responsibility in keeping pupils safe. Your dedicated team of staff know how to spot concerns and how to report them. They work effectively together and with external agencies, when appropriate, to support the high number of vulnerable pupils and their families. Records of concerns and the actions taken are carefully noted and responded to: they are fit for purpose. The recruitment and induction of new staff is carried out efficiently and effectively. Training and updates are timely and respond effectively to the changing needs of the school and the local area.

Teaching pupils how to keep themselves and others safe is an essential part of the school's curriculum. Pupils can confidently explain how to keep safe online, in school and in the community. They know that visitors, such as the police and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, are invited in to raise their awareness of dangers and how to avoid or report them. Pupils are learning how to become good citizens. They show respect to others in their actions and conversations and understand that people have different cultures and beliefs. One child said, 'I think it is fun to learn about other people's cultures. It helps us to understand more about our world.' Everyone's close attention to pupils' well-being and welfare is a strength of the school.

Inspection findings

- I was interested in finding out how effectively phonics is taught and how well pupils are supported in becoming fluent and confident readers. You and your leaders have a clear rationale for your chosen phonics programme. You have underpinned the delivery of the programme with comprehensive training and coaching for all staff who teach phonics. As a result, good phonics teaching is delivered consistently, with letter sounds and their application to writing well modelled by adults.
- Despite strong teaching in phonics over recent years, a significant proportion of pupils did not meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2018. You can clearly demonstrate the barriers this group have to learning and the highly effective support that you have put in place to help them to catch up with their peers. We observed these pupils in phonics lessons, looked at their work and I heard some of them read. The pupils say that they find reading 'tricky' but that they enjoy reading and being read to. These younger pupils told me excitedly the titles of some of their favourite books and the names of their favourite authors. Their reading books were well matched to the sounds they had learned in phonics, although some of them were still having difficulty reading with fluency. Your leaders say they encourage them to 'practise, practise, practise' re-reading books so that they become more confident readers. You rightly have plans to keep the progress of these pupils under scrutiny.
- You know that developing fluency in reading has been a challenge for many of your pupils. Leaders have put a wide range of strategies in place to address this. For example, pupils have frequent opportunities to read to adults and other pupils. Adults constantly model reading aloud. Leaders have given an emphasis to developing pupils' vocabulary, particularly as many of your pupils have lower than typical starting points in speech and language. Teachers' and teaching assistants' direction in developing pupils' understanding and use of vocabulary is very clear in lessons and in pupils' work. Pupils are encouraged to read regularly at home.
- Adult-led activities in the early years are well planned and resourced. They are carefully matched to children's needs. During my visit, a small group of children were completing a mathematics activity with an adult. Explicit mathematical vocabulary was being taught well and used effectively. Children were exploring

the concept of number, using resources to help with their understanding of number and then learning to write the number accurately. The adult's questioning was carefully pitched to make sure that all of the children made good progress in the session. However, when the children left the focused activity, there were very limited opportunities for them to practise their new-found knowledge. Our discussions with staff and checks on children's work and recent assessments confirm that children's progress in adult-led sessions is strong. However, child-initiated activities are not planned and resourced well enough to ensure that children make equally strong progress during less structured times of the day.

- You have designed a curriculum to inspire pupils to learn, deepen their knowledge, broaden their experiences and give them good life chances. These ambitions are being realised. In my conversations with pupils during my visit, their enjoyment and engagement in the curriculum shone through. Pupils were engaged in their work and most were contributing to the sessions we observed. I looked at, and listened to, leaders' plans to ensure that expectations for each subject, in each year group, were clear, as well as looking at examples of pupils' work. You appreciate that these curriculum plans could be even more ambitious in supporting the most able and those that need to catch up quickly to make consistently good progress across the curriculum.
- Governors have great confidence in school leaders and staff to bring about continued improvements. They are not afraid to question and challenge any aspect of the school's work that they think is not strong enough. Unanimously, they talk about the 'big difference that St John's Primary School makes to the lives of the pupils and their families.' They back up this proud statement with explicit examples of pupils' curriculum experiences and the positive effect these have had on pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Governors demonstrate a good knowledge of the strategies, resources and training leaders have employed to improve specific aspects of teaching and learning. They understand the positive effect these have had for pupils and where more work still needs to be done.
- Parents have a very positive view of the school and the difference you and your team make to their children. One parent said, 'My family is very welcome in school. I think the school does an amazing job. Once you step in the school, you feel that you are part of one big family.'
- You use national averages as a benchmark but have no intention of setting these as a goal. You aim for every pupil to be the best they can be. This is evidenced in your commitment to improving pupils' attendance. This has improved substantially over time and is better than the national average. You continue to look at ways this can improve further, in partnership with the attendance officer and parents.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in early years make just as much progress in their learning during child-

initiated activities as they do when they are being directly taught

- middle leaders check that the curriculum intentions for each subject, in each year group, are ambitious enough to enable the most able pupils and those who need to catch up to make consistently strong progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Rowley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, we spent time together in classrooms, observing learning and looking at the quality of pupils' work. We discussed your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. We looked at the success of the actions you and your team have taken. I held discussions with members of your governing body and had a separate meeting with the local authority head of school effectiveness. I met with the leaders for English, phonics, mathematics, science, early years and the curriculum, as well as your assistant headteachers. I spoke to pupils about their learning and the school, and listened to pupils read. I spoke to parents before school started and considered the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed a number of school documents, including the written evaluation of the school's work, documents relating to the checks made on the quality of teaching and learning, school assessment information, minutes of meetings of the governing body, attendance information, and a range of policies and safeguarding information.