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Dear Miss Rowden

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

Following my visit to the school on 29 September 2016, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You inspire the whole school community to support the learning, progress and personal development of the pupils. Under your leadership, the governors, staff, pupils and parents work together to create a culture where all are included. The comments received from the parents who responded to Ofsted's online Parent View survey were fulsome in their praise of the school's work. Parents typically value this 'supportive, multi-cultural community in the centre of the city' which responds well to challenges such as the high turnover of university families. The values of pupils of different faiths and of none are respected within the Christian ethos of the school. This is evident in events such as international evenings where families are encouraged to draw on their diverse cultural heritage to widen pupils' understanding of the world.

Pupils support each other considerably in lessons and at play. They are encouraged to think about how they can improve their work and learn from their mistakes. They enjoy a wide range of trips and clubs including the arts, animation, Lego, French and various sports supported by Exeter City Football Club. The school makes good use of its primary physical education and sport funding to encourage pupils to participate in a wide range of sport. In addition, it hires a specialist teacher from a local secondary school to train the staff, for example, in teaching gymnastics.

The school has continued to improve since its last inspection. Teaching grows from strength to strength, due to more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of its impact on the progress that pupils make. As a result, pupils are highly engaged in their learning. Teachers value the wide range of up-to-date training provided and the school's links with Exeter University and other local schools. The focus on improving teaching and learning has led to high staff morale and a culture where teachers reflect deeply on the impact of their practice. This has led to significant improvements, especially in pupils' progress in mathematics which, in 2015, was equal to the top seven percent of schools in the country. Information on pupils' progress in 2016 also indicates high achievement in mathematics and reading at key stage 2. You have aspirations to raise pupils' progress in writing across the school and in reading at key stage 1, especially in the Year 1 phonics check which is below average, to these high standards.

Governors hold you and other leaders to account and support you in setting the strategic direction of the school highly successfully. They ensure that provision, including pupil premium funding, has a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress. The difference in progress between the disadvantaged pupils and others nationally is diminishing rapidly, although not so quickly in writing. Governors are very effective because they have an in-depth knowledge of the work of the school. They gain this through regular visits, examining information on pupils' progress and personal development, and carrying out rigorous and regular monitoring of the school improvement plan. They survey the views of parents and pupils to identify any further improvements that can be made.

Overall, the aspirational leadership and governance is ensuring that St Sidwell's is a good and strongly improving school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your deputy and the governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. You have created a culture of vigilance with regard to safeguarding pupils. All staff and governors keep up to date with training, for example in safeguarding, safer recruitment and preventing radicalisation and extremism. This enables you to ensure that suitable policies and procedures are in place and implemented by all staff. Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, including their attendance, are monitored rigorously and appropriate action is taken to address any issues. This includes working with external agencies when necessary. Incidents are recorded well and followed up robustly.

Pupils say they feel safe in school, and parents and staff agree. Pupils learn how to keep safe, for example, from cyber bullying or misuse of social media. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and they are confident that staff would deal swiftly with any that might occur. Pupils value their diversity. They take pride in helping each other, as in befriending anyone who appears to have no friends to play with in the playground.

Inspection findings

- Your vision of an inspiring learning community and high expectations of what the pupils can achieve are shared by the whole school community. Together with governors and staff, you work hard to engage all parents in supporting their children's learning.
- Parents value the recently introduced drop-in sessions where they can look at their children's books and speak with their teachers. They also like the packs you provide to help them to support their children's learning at home.
- You provide clear direction for staff through the school improvement plan. The relevant priorities in the plan are informed by accurate and rigorous self-evaluation. This is underpinned by robust monitoring of the progress of all pupils. Assessments are moderated with other local schools and the local authority to ensure that they are accurate.
- Senior and middle leaders contribute well to the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress through observations of lessons, examination of teachers' planning and pupils' books, and analysis of pupils' progress information.
- These leaders hold staff to account for the progress pupils make and evaluate the impact of any additional support provided. However, their impact is not yet consistently strong across all subjects.
- Staff, including those new to teaching, are supported well by established systems, such as those for supporting the management of their performance, for planning lessons and for providing feedback on pupils' work.
- Children in the early years get off to a flying start. The proportion achieving a good level of development is above average. A special feature of the provision in the early years is the attention given to developing pupils' language skills through nursery rhymes, stories and songs. This benefits all children and enables those who are at an early stage of learning English to make rapid gains.
- Throughout the school, the quality of teaching is particularly strong in mathematics as teachers ensure that the levels of challenge are matched well to the needs of all pupils. Pupils say, and the evidence confirms, that they make most progress in this subject.
- The most able pupils make strong progress across subjects. They draw on a range of reading skills, including phonics, to tackle new texts. They apply their numeracy and writing skills well.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress in mathematics because the level of challenge is matched well to their starting points. They are not all fluent readers because some do not read widely and often enough, including at home, to apply their new skills confidently. Their writing is frequently held back by their limited vocabulary and simple sentences. Recent training in the teaching of writing and support packs for parents to hear their children reading, are helping to address these issues.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are given appropriate additional support in mathematics and reading, including phonics, which helps them to make at least expected progress from their starting points. They make slower progress in writing because the work is not consistently matched to their specific needs.
- Pupils respond well to the high expectations of their behaviour across the school. This results in a calm, orderly environment. Pupils are eager to learn. They say, and parents agree, that they enjoy school. This is confirmed by their above-average levels of attendance.
- Pupils and parents typically comment that they like the 'calm, caring, inclusive and friendly nature' of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing and, in key stage 1 their progress in reading, is as strong as their progress in mathematics, by:
 - refining teachers' use of assessment in lessons and in providing feedback on pupils' work to identify precisely the next steps in learning, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The specific areas of focus for the inspection were:

1. what the school is doing to improve pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics check
2. what the school is doing to improve pupils' progress in writing, so that it is as good as their progress in mathematics and, at key stage 2, their reading
3. what the school is doing to achieve such good progress overall and how well teachers are using assessment to ensure that all pupils make equally strong progress, particularly the most able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
4. the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils.

The inspection activities to test out these aspects were:

- meetings with you, governors, middle leaders, a group of pupils and some parents
- examining pupils' progress information
- hearing pupils reading
- examining the work in pupils' books from last year, especially for the most able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- observing the pupils working in lessons
- observing pupils in the playground
- examining the school improvement plan and other documents including records relating to the safeguarding of pupils, their behaviour and attendance.

I took account of the 44 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey, of the 21 responses to the online survey for staff and the 131 responses to the online survey for pupils.