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Miss Alexandra Symondson
Interim Executive Headteacher
St James and Ebrington Church of England Primary School
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Dear Miss Symondson

Short inspection of St James and Ebrington Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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 May 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

In the short period of time you have been at the school, you have provided a sense of direction and a clear vision for the future. Importantly, you have provided much-needed stability at an unsettled time. You have ambition for the school and staff and governors respect your personal and proactive approach. To support this drive for improvement, you have identified very quickly and astutely the areas that are not as strong as you would like them to be. Your plans for the future are well devised and seek to secure the capacity of leaders to sustain improvement in the long term.

Governors share this ambition and have, quite rightly, recognised that there now needs to be a sharper focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards. To this end, the governing body has been reconstituted. The new chair of governors is working hard to ensure that the governing body has the expertise and training to support and challenge leaders. Governors are committed to the school and visit regularly and meet with leaders, but they agree that they need better information about the progress that pupils are making to do this more effectively. In response, leaders are currently redesigning assessment systems to more accurately track this. This will be pivotal in developing tighter monitoring systems to accurately evaluate the standard of education that the school provides.

You are well supported by senior leaders, who are refining the skills they need to achieve the priorities that have been identified. They are committed to the success of the school and are open to the support that has been provided. Crucially, they have now been given the scope to lead school improvement in their own right.

Staff are supportive and optimistic about the future. They are receptive to developing their skills but require further training so that they are confident in applying revised approaches in their classroom. Central to your school improvement philosophy has been to provide support so that teachers can learn from practice elsewhere. However, as this is in its infancy, expectations and systems are either not fully defined or are at an early stage of development. Therefore, practice is variable, and this has resulted in pupils not making the progress that they are capable of, particularly in mathematics.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to improve the quality of teaching, so that all pupils make more rapid progress, particularly in writing. In 2018, pupils made better progress in writing, and this was a result of a focus on developing technical accuracy and a greater understanding of how to structure written compositions. However, this has not been a consistent picture over recent years. The work of current pupils shows that this is still not secure, particularly in providing a level of suitable challenge for pupils to build on what they have learned before. In addition, teachers do not follow the agreed policy for giving feedback to pupils. This hinders their ability to improve further and demonstrate that they can apply these skills. Therefore, issues from the last inspection remain. This is indicative of the fact that leaders have not been able to create the momentum needed to address these areas quickly enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They are continuing to develop approaches that will provide a greater clarity in their record-keeping. This has proved successful and has ensured that leaders have all the necessary information in one place. Leaders ensure that statutory checks are made to check that staff are suitable to work with children. Staff are suitably trained and use the systems effectively to report concerns. Action taken is swift and leaders work effectively with external agencies when necessary. They know the pupils and families who are considered to be vulnerable and are conscientious about following up concerns to achieve the right resolution.

The school is a vibrant and welcoming environment. Pupils are engaged and engaging. They speak enthusiastically about their experience of school. They believe that teachers look after them well and support them to achieve their very best. Your Christian values are evident in the high level of respect and understanding that pupils show towards each other. Pupils say that behaviour is positive and understand the difference between bullying and pupils 'falling out'. They are adamant that bullying is rare, but that staff deal with issues effectively when they do occur. Parents and staff both agree that the school is a safe environment for pupils to learn.

Pupils know how to stay healthy and recognise risk, including when online. For example, they spoke positively of their first aid sessions and know how to call an ambulance if necessary. They also say that teachers are considerate of their well-being. They value diversity and appreciate the recognition teachers give them when they demonstrate the attributes outlined in the school's values. They like to receive house points and are keen to be included on the 'courtesy tree' that hangs in the school hall.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry. The first of these focused on the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 2 in reading and writing. We particularly considered the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) as these two groups of pupils have made weaker progress than their peers over recent years.
- Where teaching is stronger, pupils demonstrate an ability to write with greater fluency. They can use a wide range of adventurous vocabulary, sometimes using literary techniques to add a greater depth to their descriptive pieces. They can define complex words and use these to display greater maturity in their own compositions. They are beginning to use agreed approaches to structure their writing across a broad range of subjects. For example, pupils considering the best soil to take to the moon, depending on its ability to absorb moisture, were able to use their knowledge to write analytically to explain their choices.
- Where teaching is weaker, teachers do not routinely tailor activities to the appropriate starting points for pupils. Pupils who require support with their literacy skills are often presented with texts that are too challenging for them. Conversely, for the most able pupils, activities can be limiting, or too similar, in their design. Therefore, pupils are not able to use a broader range of stimuli to write convincingly at the highest standards. Moreover, teachers' guidance does not precisely pinpoint the skills that will allow pupils to improve the quality of their responses. Where teachers do not highlight misconceptions in spelling and punctuation, these are not rectified. This hampers pupils' ability to express their ideas effectively.
- Additional adults provide support for pupils with SEND and this leads to improvements in the short term. You have renewed the approach to the teaching of phonics and pupils are starting to use this understanding to decode and spell unfamiliar words. However, targets for pupils with SEND are too general and often ambiguous. Therefore, it is not possible to evaluate accurately how well pupils are progressing over the longer term.
- The second line of enquiry centred on the challenge provided for pupils in mathematics. Leaders have identified that this remains the weaker area of learning across the school. This is reflected in the progress that the most able pupils make by the end of Year 6, which is below that typically seen nationally. Leaders are establishing new ways of working to provide increased challenge for pupils. Where this is applied, pupils demonstrate improvement in their arithmetical skills and can apply their mathematical understanding to more complex reasoning and problem-solving tasks.

- Where teaching is not as assured, pupils often complete tasks that are too simple for their level of ability. Where pupils do consider more challenging questions, they are often not sure how to proceed. This is because they have not been provided with the direction they need. They are not confident in developing a hypothesis and testing this out by drawing on their prior knowledge. In addition, teachers do not consistently follow a clear sequence of learning to support pupils to build on their understanding in an incremental way. Where errors in calculation and number orientation are not rectified, pupils' progress is limited.
- The final line of enquiry was to evaluate the capacity of leadership to achieve the improvements needed at the pace required. Leaders and governors are determined to develop expertise, at all levels, to provide a strong foundation from which the school can build. To do this, however, leaders and governors understand that self-evaluation needs to be more robust so that the impact of actions is defined with more precision. In your role as executive headteacher, you are rapidly getting to know the school and have identified that previous evaluation was largely inaccurate or overgenerous. You are working hard to rectify this.
- Governors are aware of how the additional funding, provided for disadvantaged pupils and the development of sport, is spent. They are clear on the actions that have been taken but are less secure on whether these strategies have been successful. They recognise that they need this information to be able to inform future spending. There is also an awareness of the need to align more closely the social and emotional needs of pupils with their academic progress. This is integral to the way in which leaders are developing assessment systems, so that they can confidently track the progress of different groups of pupils. You recognise there is still some way to go to establish this approach and ensure that this is fully embedded throughout the school.
- You understand that there is a need to build stronger middle leadership to hasten the rate of improvement. Training and development is available from your federation of schools but, as this is new, its impact is not yet realised. Middle leaders' understanding of their role is being developed but, at present, they are not secure enough in their own knowledge to lead confidently on their areas of responsibility to have an impact on standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they establish and embed more effective assessment systems, so that the progress of pupils can be checked and tracked more accurately
- teachers use assessment information to identify misconceptions and plan work that matches the learning needs of all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
- leaders' self-evaluation is developed so that there is more rigour in how the impact of actions is determined
- the most able pupils are routinely challenged to reach the highest standards

- leaders' skills and expertise are developed so that they have a greater impact on improving standards in their areas of responsibility.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the beginning of the day, I met with you and the two assistant headteachers to agree key lines of enquiry. Following this, we worked extensively together visiting lessons on both sites and scrutinising pupils' written work across a range of subjects and age groups. I met with representatives from the local authority, the governing body, curriculum leaders and pupils. I also scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school, including policies relating to safeguarding. When making final judgements, I considered 50 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, along with 48 additional comments made by parents and 13 responses to the staff questionnaire provided by Ofsted.