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Mrs Sheryl Cooper
Acting Headteacher
St Cuthbert's Church of England Infants School
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Dear Mrs Cooper

Short inspection of St Cuthbert's Church of England Infants School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You and the acting deputy headteacher have taken up your new roles very recently. However, because of the wealth of experience you bring from your previous roles, you have maintained a momentum for improvement and inspired the confidence of the school community. In February of this year, the school extended its age range to provide education for two- to seven-year-old pupils. This brought the pre-school facilities into the main school building. You recognise that there is more to do to make the pre-school a full part of the school's strong early years provision.

You and your colleagues are reflective leaders and check through regular parent surveys to ensure that you take heed of parents' and pupils' views. Pupils know that 'try your best' is one of the three school rules, and they demonstrate this in their learning. Parents value the school's caring ethos. One parent, reflecting the opinions of others, described the school as 'a wonderful nurturing place where my child feels happy and safe and looks forward to attending every day'.

Leaders were asked at the previous inspection to give subject leaders wider opportunities to improve the quality of teaching. Subject leaders have successfully implemented the new curriculum for reading, writing and mathematics. In the 2017 national assessments, there were considerable improvements in pupils' outcomes in every aspect of the school. Almost all pupils achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. Standards at the end of Year 2 were

above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics and represented strong progress for this group of pupils from their different starting points.

You and other leaders, including governors, have identified the school's next steps for improvement accurately. Since taking up your post as headteacher, you and governors have recognised that by including targets for pupils' progress and attainment in the school improvement plan, you can better measure the success of the actions you have taken. You note, however, that this is still work in progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. All staff have regular and appropriate child protection training and are clear about what they should do if they have any safeguarding concerns. Leaders are quick to seek further help and guidance from other agencies so that families and pupils receive the support they need. Leaders make stringent checks on staff and volunteers who work in school. Governors regularly talk with staff to check the impact of training and work closely with leaders to keep processes and policies up to date and fit for purpose.

Pupils feel safe and their parents rightly believe that their children are happy and well cared for. Pupils have been taught about staying safe and understand how to use the internet safely. They know the reason why visitors need to wear a badge and how to report should they see an adult without one.

Pupils say that friends are kind and look after each other. They are confident that any problems they have are quickly sorted out by their teachers. Pupils play together well, but some mentioned the boisterous behaviour of a few boys. Leaders are aware of this and the rules for playground behaviour are being made explicit.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I looked at whether the most able pupils in the school are making good progress and reaching standards higher than those expected for their age. A number of children enter the Reception class with skills lower than those usually found, but there is a wide variation in children's starting points. Teachers recognise all children's potential and by the end of the Reception Year, an increasingly high proportion are reaching standards exceeding the early learning goals. This is particularly true in children's skills in reading.
- As leaders, you were disappointed that in 2016, too few of the most able pupils had made the progress necessary to reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You took steps to improve teachers' knowledge of the new curriculum, changed the programmes of work that pupils used and set targets that are more challenging for individual pupils. As a result, in recent assessments, the proportions of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading and writing are greater than those found nationally. There was also a significant improvement in the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standards in

mathematics. We could see from pupils' workbooks that progress in mathematics is accelerating as the new scheme of work helps pupils to solve problems more systematically.

- My second line of enquiry was to check how well boys develop skills in reading and writing, including phonics. This was because, over time, boys' achievement in literacy was noticeably weaker than girls'. Together we visited phonics lessons in every class. I looked at pupils' workbooks and read with boys, including those who were disadvantaged, from Year 1 and Year 2. Boys use their phonic skills well to tackle and read unknown words. Many read fluently and show their understanding by commenting on characters and events as they do so. Pupils say that they enjoy reading at school and at home.
- The most able boys, particularly by the end of Year 2, write expressively and show good punctuation and handwriting skills. In Year 1, pupils' writing about traditional tales shows that some boys have difficulty forming letters accurately and this restricts their ability to express their ideas. In the phonics lessons, we saw pupils repeating and reading new sounds accurately. At times, not enough emphasis is placed on developing pupils' ability to write and form letters correctly. Consequently, some boys do not develop accurate and consistent formation of letters by the end of Year 1. Workbooks show, however, that they catch up by the end of Year 2.
- I next looked at whether the use of additional funding through the pupil premium is accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made good progress and in some cases exceptional progress. Those with the potential to do so reached or exceeded the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Governors monitor the impact of the pupil premium closely and ensure that it is used effectively to raise pupils' achievements. They can account for the value of the intervention programmes, which hasten the progress of disadvantaged pupils. In lessons, we saw teachers and teaching assistants giving pupils good support and challenging them to develop their ideas.
- My next line of enquiry was to check the quality of teaching and learning in the pre-school, particularly for children aged two years. This is a new venture for the school and consequently, the leader for early years has only recently begun to develop the provision.
- We visited the pre-school together and saw children learning and having their morning snack. We noted that children were behaving well and taking part in the planned activities. However, some of the activities lacked challenge and were not planned precisely enough to take account of children's ages and stages of development. Staff had not adjusted planning to take account of assessments in the two-year-old checks, particularly in relation to children's speaking skills. You and governors have recently monitored the provision in the pre-school and have accurately identified where improvements need to be made. For example, you recognise that two-year-old children need space away from the older children in order to rest. You have planned to develop this provision as a high priority.
- Lastly, I reviewed attendance to check if you have reduced the high level of absence for disadvantaged pupils. Overall, attendance improved last year. You

have identified the group of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, who over time have not attended regularly. By working more closely with families and with other agencies, you have improved the attendance of these pupils. Pupils value and respond well to the new rewards for good attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans for the school's development are related to targets for pupils' progress and attainment so that evaluation of the school's effectiveness is sharper
- pupils, particularly boys, develop accurate handwriting skills at an earlier stage and therefore make faster progress across the school
- planned improvements to the pre-school take place rapidly so that children make good progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Marriott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and middle leaders. I met with members of the governing body including the chair and the vice-chair. I also met with a group of pupils and read with pupils from Year 1 and Year 2. I spoke with pupils in the lunch hall and on the playground. I visited lessons with you. We looked at pupils' workbooks and records of their progress over time. We made two visits to the pre-school. I discussed safeguarding with members of staff and looked at the records of training and recruitment which the school holds. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of the 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I examined a variety of documents including leaders' evaluation of the performance of the school and plans for improvement.