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Mrs Sonia Beames
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Beames

Short inspection of Withington Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The school's leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school. Since the previous inspection there have been significant changes to the leadership of the school, including your appointment as headteacher. You have successfully generated a clear vision for the school which is grounded firmly on further improving the quality of teaching and the standards that pupils achieve. You have made sure that the school's vision is clearly understood by staff, governors and parents who all feel a part of the school team. They speak strongly of your uncompromising drive to achieve the best outcomes for pupils. While raising expectations of teachers and pupils, you have ensured that the support and challenge you provide to teachers means that they are eager to continue to improve their practice. Staff say, 'We are a team. We are all responsible for all our children's progress and development.'

At the time of the last inspection, the school was asked to provide more opportunities for pupils to write extensively in other subjects and to ensure that pupils' written work was neatly presented. Evidence seen during the inspection showed that pupils have opportunities to write in different styles in a range of different subject areas. For example, during a topic on volcanoes key stage 2 pupils wrote at length in their history, geography and science work linked to the topic. Pupils' books showed that the presentation of their work has improved. This is more consistently the case in key stage 2.

At the last inspection, the school was also asked to make sure that all staff had the opportunity to learn from each other and to develop teachers' questioning to help pupils gain deeper understanding. As headteacher, you carefully monitor the quality of teaching and make time to review teachers' practice with them. They value these opportunities to share and improve their teaching. You have enabled staff to observe the strongest practice in other schools and instigated further training and qualification opportunities for the school's support staff. Teachers' questioning helps pupils to develop their thinking. This is done especially well when pupils are engaged in writing, particularly in the Reception and in key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders know the pupils in their care and their families very well. The school's leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Regular up-to-date training means that staff and governors know what is expected of them. They understand and implement the most recent government guidance, including on how to help protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Safeguarding is central to the role of the governing body and members regularly and carefully monitor the school's work to keep pupils safe. The school's systems make sure that new staff are recruited safely and the induction process places emphasis on the clear culture of safeguarding which the school promotes.

Pupils overwhelmingly say they feel safe in school. They are very clear that they know who to talk to if they have a worry or concern and that adults will help them. Parents very strongly agree that their children are happy, safe and well looked after in school. Parents comment favourably on the education and support their children receive at this school, saying, for example, 'This school has enabled my child to thrive.' Pupils have a clear understanding of bullying, including cyber bullying, and they say this rarely, if ever, happens. Their parents overwhelmingly agree. The school's curriculum helps pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, for example when using new technologies such as the internet.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to check how leaders were ensuring effective provision for writing in the school. By the end of key stage 2, pupils can write well. In the most recent Year 6 national tests, pupils made slightly better progress in writing than pupils nationally. Leaders have increased the expectations of what is required in writing with the result that standards of handwriting, spelling and punctuation are improving, particularly in key stage 2. You know that this practice is currently less well developed in key stage 1. As headteacher, you carefully monitor teachers' planning and make sure it links opportunities for pupils to write at length and in different styles throughout their literacy and curriculum work in both key stage 1 and key stage 2. In the early years, children are skilfully supported by adults to enable them to use their early writing skills. However, there are fewer opportunities for children to extend their skills by choosing for themselves from purposeful activities.

- My second line of enquiry was to check what the school was doing to improve progress in mathematics. Evidence seen during the inspection shows that current pupils are making good progress in mathematics. For example, in key stage 1, pupils were able to demonstrate their understanding of shape by confidently and accurately reading and analysing information to help them sort regular and irregular shapes. In key stage 2, the approaches you have introduced are helping pupils, including the most able of them, to strengthen their understanding of mathematical concepts. The support you are giving to teachers in their teaching of mathematics means they can meet the differing needs of pupils well.
- My final line of enquiry was to see how well disadvantaged pupils achieve at the school. Disadvantaged pupils make progress that is similar to other pupils. At times, they make strong progress. For example, in the most recent Year 6 assessments, disadvantaged pupils made progress which was above that of pupils nationally in both reading and writing and above other pupils in the school in reading.
- The new information tracking system means that information on disadvantaged pupils' progress is more readily available to governors. Through pupil progress meetings you hold teachers to account for the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Governors monitor the spending of the additional funds for disadvantaged pupils. Over time, their allocation of money to activities such as the before-school club has helped to increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils so that it is now better than all pupils nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide further opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning skills so more of them can achieve at the highest level in mathematics
- there are consistently high expectations of pupils' handwriting and spelling in their writing in key stage 1
- children in the early years have more opportunities to choose from a range of purposeful activities to extend their learning.

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 O'Donnell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and we talked about developments in the school since the last inspection. I looked at safeguarding records and tested out your recruitment and vetting procedures. I held discussions with four governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I talked to other teachers and support staff around the school. Together, we visited mathematics and English lessons, carried out a learning walk and spent time in the early years unit. We looked at the work in pupils' books and spoke with them about their work. I observed pupils during lunchtime break and talked to pupils about their life in school. I looked at the 17 responses to Parent View and considered the comments submitted. I also considered the responses received to the staff and pupil questionnaires.