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Mrs Claire Marsland
Headteacher
St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School, Frome
Christchurch Street East
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Dear Mrs Marsland

Short inspection of St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School, Frome

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2015, you have sustained the best aspects of the school, in particular the good level of care that pupils receive. You quickly initiated new approaches to teaching that effectively meet the demands of the new national curriculum and the way pupils are assessed. You have faced challenges, mostly relating to changes in staffing. However, you demonstrate a determination and ambition to raise standards further and ensure that every pupil succeeds at St. John's.

You have an accurate and realistic understanding of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. You acted promptly on the recommendation from the previous inspection report to develop improvement planning. Plans are tightly focused on improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement, particularly for the most able pupils. Leaders and governors are fully committed to implementing the necessary changes to ensure that the school goes from strength to strength.

You were aware that the most able pupils were not challenged sufficiently to reach the highest standards across subjects in 2016. You provided a range of training and professional development for staff to extend their skills and increase their effectiveness. A greater number of pupils in key stage 1 achieved beyond the

standards expected for their age this year because of focused teaching. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that there is more to do to ensure that the most able children in the early years are extended fully in their learning.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They praise its caring and friendly ethos where their children thrive both academically and in their personal development. Pupils enjoy their learning and work hard. They respond well to the 'Five Bs' system that not only guides them to behave well but also teaches them to be kind and thoughtful towards others.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding is strong because you, your staff and your governors give the safety of pupils the highest priority. All staff and governors receive the appropriate training to identify possible signs of risk and harm. Records show that teachers are up to date in their training, including guidance in recognising the dangers of extremism and terrorism. Recruitment and vetting procedures for appointing staff follow the statutory guidance stringently. The governor responsible for safeguarding frequently checks that the school's single central record is maintained accurately. Governors also check that staff understand how to report any concerns promptly.

You get to know the families of pupils who attend St John's well. Staff keep a close eye on their welfare, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. They work closely with local agencies to ensure that pupils receive the care and support they need. Records are of good quality. Parents recognise the lengths to which staff go to provide a welcoming and inclusive school where every child is valued. Pupils confirm that they feel safe and secure in school because they say, 'There is always someone there to help you.' Events such as anti-bullying week and internet safety training ensure that pupils are well prepared to face risk in society.

Most pupils attend well and are seldom late for school. The school works closely with other professionals, such as the parent support adviser, to help families sort out any worries and to promote regular attendance. However, a small minority of pupils do not attend regularly and you are taking further steps to address this.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I met with you to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection. We agreed the following lines of enquiry: how successfully leaders have raised achievement in the early years; how well the most able pupils are challenged in mathematics and reading to achieve high standards across the school; and how well the school keeps pupils safe.
- Outcomes in the early years have fluctuated year on year and are just below national figures. Following a dip in performance in 2016, you made changes to the curriculum. Phonics is taught more regularly and thoroughly, helping to raise standards in reading and writing. Teachers plan activities that interest girls in mathematics and their achievement improved noticeably in 2017. Although

standards showed improvement this year, you are aware that the most able children could achieve more.

- You have focused uncompromisingly on improving teaching in mathematics across the school. You identified that the most able pupils were not challenged well enough to enable them to reach higher standards. Through effective staff development, you have raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers plan work that better promotes fluent skills in calculation and stretches pupils' thinking. For example, in Year 2, the most able pupils use their reasoning skills well to explain and justify their answers when solving number problems. Work in books confirms that they are making faster progress. Your assessment data confirms that more pupils achieved higher standards across the school in 2017 because of the greater challenge in pupils' work.
- While most pupils reached the expected standard for their age in 2016 at the end of key stage 1, not many exceeded this. To address this, you have ensured that reading skills are taught systematically across the school. You have developed positive attitudes to reading so that pupils are enthused and read widely and often. Teachers encourage the most able readers to try more challenging texts. Older pupils read fluently and with obvious enjoyment. They use a range of strategies, including deploying their knowledge of phonics, to ensure that they read accurately. They use punctuation well to put expression in their reading and aid understanding. More pupils achieved beyond the expected standard for their age this year because of better teaching.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- progress in the early years continues to accelerate so that more children achieve highly and are well prepared for the start of Year 1
- they make greater use of the strong partnership with parents to raise pupils' attendance.

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

Sandra Woodman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and improvements since the previous inspection. Together, we observed learning in classrooms and looked at a range of pupils' work in books. I listened to several of the most able pupils reading from key stage 1 and key stage 2. I met with pupils to talk about their experience of school life. I held meetings with middle leaders and with two governors. In addition, I spoke with a representative of the local authority. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and attendance information. I took account of the written comments of 56 parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the views of parents who spoke to me before the start of the school day. I also took account of the views of 16 members of staff who returned the online questionnaire.