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Miss Angela Rawlinson
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Dear Miss Rawlinson

Short inspection of St James' CofE Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 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. The quality of teaching over time is good. Pupils continue to do well during their time in the school. You have a clear vision for raising the achievement of pupils further, building their self-belief and giving them a good foundation for life, as well as for secondary school. Staff, parents and pupils believe in you and are very supportive of what the school is achieving. Over recent years, you have managed an extensive, complex and challenging building programme, as well as running the day-to-day life of the school successfully. Wall displays throughout the school show that you value the school's long history as much as transforming the school premises into a bright, modern place to learn. Classroom activities in the school now typically involve pupils making good use of modern technology to assist their learning.

A central strength of the school remains the commitment of staff and leaders to the motto: 'care, share and respect'. There is well-considered support in place to help families whenever needed. Pupils want to come to school and attend well. There are many extra opportunities for pupils' learning when not in lessons, for example through the exciting and recent residential trip for Year 5 to Coniston. Relationships between pupils and with staff continue to be strong. Where pupils become seriously ill, the whole school pulls together to give support and promote awareness through fundraising and letter writing, as well as full explanation on the school website.

You want to see pupils understand their role in modern Britain. Thus, staff and leaders have planned carefully how pupils learn about democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, respect and tolerance. These values are included not only in subjects but in procedures, activities and events throughout the school year. Just recently, pupils were thrilled to receive a visit from their local Member of Parliament. You want pupils to believe in their own capabilities. The challenge to pupils of 'What have you done today to make you feel proud?' is displayed very visibly throughout the school.

At the previous inspection, one aspect to improve was that the school further develop the teaching of writing. Over subsequent years, leaders and staff have achieved this improvement. For example, by 2015, boys and girls in the school were doing equally well in national assessments of their writing and both groups of pupils attained better than their peers nationally. Leaders have made sure that pupils have many meaningful opportunities for writing in different subjects. Careful thought is given to how well staff teach writing and assist boys and girls to become confident and skilled writers.

Another aspect of the school that you have improved is the way in which staff use assessment of pupils' learning across subjects. In classes, pupils make good use of technology to assess and record their own learning. Staff check and review pupils' learning carefully and make considered use of information to improve teaching. As a result, a greater proportion of pupils have been achieving highly in their learning since the previous inspection. You recognise that, given the higher expectations of the new national curriculum, not all of the most able pupils in the school make as much progress as they should. During the inspection, I identified that governors do not challenge leaders enough about this aspect of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of the school in caring for pupils and protecting them from harm is very positive. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff to whom I spoke understand the different risks and challenges faced by local pupils. Staff know how to spot, report and chase up any concerns. Information-sharing with other agencies is prompt and appropriate. Staff and governors are given annual training about their responsibilities for safeguarding. The fact that higher-level training about child protection is shared among several staff is an example of good practice and helps to make sure that pupils are well protected. New government guidance about keeping children safe has been shared appropriately with staff and governors. Close links with the police, as well as local family support services, mean that the school is able to act quickly to provide help and guidance for families.

Messages for pupils and parents about how to make safe use of the internet and mobile phones are promoted regularly. The school is vigilant in making sure that pupils do not take mobile phones into classrooms. Within school activities, pupils are given frequent and wide-ranging advice about how to keep themselves safe in their daily lives. Although the current child protection policy published online is not up to

date, the many well-established safeguarding practices and procedures in place show that this issue does not indicate wider weaknesses.

Inspection findings

- You have a clear understanding of what the school does well and where further improvement is required. You ensure that staff expertise benefits from well-planned training and many opportunities to learn with and from other schools. Leaders' emphasis upon the careful selection of new staff to join the team is also helping the school to sustain its good work. Staff use of technology within teaching is a new strength of the school. For example, staff make skilful and purposeful use of electronic whiteboards and tablets to improve pupils' learning in different activities.
- Over the past two years, you have introduced changes carefully to the wide range of subjects studied at school, as required by the new national curriculum. You place a strong focus on building the skills and contribution of individual staff as well as those in leadership roles. There is now much collaborative planning of teaching between staff. Careful thought is given as to how to make lessons exciting and meaningful. Worthwhile links are now being made across subjects to make new topics such as 'water exploration' interesting and engaging. Leaders make sure that geography and history are rooted first in developing pupils' knowledge of the local area and the Lake District where they live. Much care has been given to planning for pupils' growth of skills and knowledge in these subjects. Nevertheless, your reviews of teaching do not make enough detailed checks on how well teaching is covering the new requirements in geography and history. Leaders have correctly set this issue as a current priority for improvement.
- Where teaching is most successful, there is careful adaptation of subjects and content to meet the needs of pupils. More regular reviews and improved planning by staff and leaders are making steady improvements to the teaching of different ability groups of pupils, for example through giving pupils additional help with their learning in different subjects outside of main lessons where needed. Extra funding through the pupil premium is planned, spent and reviewed carefully, for example to give extra help to promote disadvantaged pupils' progress in phonics, identified as a priority because some most-able disadvantaged pupils achieved less well in 2016.
- The quality of pupils' writing has improved over time and is good. There are many opportunities set for pupils to become inspired to write through reading, watching drama and meeting poets and authors. Pupils are encouraged to have a go at writing with confidence and make full use of new language they have acquired. In mathematics, pupils are being set more real-life problems to challenge their thinking. However, assessments of pupils' progress, as well as examples of their work, show that not enough pupils are achieving highly in mathematics and English. We agreed that this is particularly an issue for the most able pupils in your school.

- Members of the school governing body are strongly committed to helping the school to improve. They visit regularly and talk to staff, pupils and parents so that they are not wholly reliant upon the headteacher to tell them about the school. Governors contribute actively to the running of extra school activities such as clubs and trips. Nonetheless, they do not give leaders enough challenge about the progress made by the most able pupils. They discuss pupils' attainment more fully, which they know is strong across subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors challenge leaders thoroughly about pupils' progress across subjects
- teaching provides greater challenge for the most able pupils so that they learn and achieve in greater depth
- the child protection policy is updated to fully reflect the Department for Education's statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2016'.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you and I discussed your reviews of the school and your plans for improvement. We looked at a sample of pupils' work, spoke to some pupils and observed teaching and learning in classrooms. I spoke with some staff to hear about their work and to check their understanding of safeguarding. I considered 22 responses from staff to an Ofsted online survey. I met with five members of the governing body, including the chair, and considered letters sent to Ofsted by other governors. I reviewed responses from 102 pupils to the Ofsted online pupil survey. I spoke with parents at the school entrance and took account of 19 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I reviewed school records of checks made on the suitability of staff, governors and visitors. I considered a sample of other school records about child protection.

The inspection was observed by an Ofsted inspector who played no part in the judgements made by HMI about the school.