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Fergus Stewart
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Dear Mr Stewart

Short inspection of St Laurence School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 2017 with Ofsted inspector Sheila Crew, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Under your leadership, the school continues to flourish. You have carefully combined the school's longstanding caring ethos, which is built on its Christian foundation, with a greater focus on improving outcomes for pupils. Your approach to leadership is characterised by careful reflection. You have been successful in improving the school because you have been very honest and direct with yourself and with others in identifying areas of weakness. As a result, you have been able to address these weaknesses and improve them. This approach has united senior leaders and staff in common cause behind you. Governors are effective in holding leaders to account. They have the same transparent and self-critical approach that pervades the rest of the school.

The last inspection report asked you to further improve the quality of teaching. You have responded very well. You and your leadership team ensure that improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is at the very heart of the work of the school. You have created a clear vision of teaching and learning that is based on two pillars: firstly, that teachers must ensure the tasks they set accurately meet the needs of their pupils. Secondly, that pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work. As a result of these approaches, pupils' progress is improving. Teachers are focusing on reviewing pupils' previous work and adapting their teaching appropriately. Teachers and pupils both articulate the importance of pupils

reflecting on their work and on the next steps in their learning. This emphasis is having a significant effect on how pupils think about themselves as learners, and hence the progress that they make.

Senior leaders have made sure that the school's training programme for teachers is tied in closely to the school's teaching and learning priorities and that it is monitored and adapted over time to meet needs as teachers progress. As a result of this work, classroom conversations between teachers and pupils about taking the next steps in learning are now commonplace.

As a result of your work on teaching and learning, standards overall in the main school are good. Standards in the sixth form are in line with the national average and improving. The work pupils are doing is challenging them and they are rising to that challenge. Over the years, lower prior attaining pupils and disadvantaged pupils have not made the above-average progress that higher prior attaining pupils have. You are aware of this and are keen to ensure that these pupils benefit from improvements in the quality of teaching. You have used the pupil premium grant effectively to improve the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils, but you know that there is more to do to ensure they fully reach their potential.

You recognise that improvements in the quality of teaching and the subsequent raising of standards have not been consistently strong across all subjects in the school. Pupils make better progress in English, mathematics and science than their peers in other schools. They also are very successful in history and geography. However, in other subjects improvements have been slower to take hold and progress is broadly in line with the national picture. You and your senior leaders have developed a strong culture of holding middle leaders to account. You appropriately focus your efforts in those subjects where middle leaders require additional challenge and support. Middle leaders are making significant progress in addressing the remaining issues.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that there is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe across the school. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and that effective and appropriate checks are made on staff and visitors. There is a comprehensive programme in place to remind pupils about how to keep themselves safe online. Relationships between teachers and pupils are strong and pupils are confident that there is someone in school they can go to if they have a concern. Bullying is rare and is dealt with well when it does happen.

Pupils and parents value the support pupils receive when they need it, and parents are also appreciative of the staff's efforts to involve them and keep them informed.

Staff work well to protect vulnerable pupils and where necessary liaise with external agencies and parents appropriately.

Inspection findings

At the start of the day, we agreed that this short inspection would focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils, on the progress of lower prior attaining pupils, on the sixth form and on variation in standards across different subjects. In addition, you asked that we consider the assessment and feedback process that you have developed.

- Disadvantaged pupils achieved broadly in line with other pupils nationally in 2016; this was an improvement on 2015. School leaders now aim to improve the progress of these pupils further so that they do as well as other pupils in the school. There is a rigorous process of checking on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make and intervening to support them where necessary. Pastoral staff and subject leaders work together to support pupils who are underachieving. The school's work to focus on these pupils is now yielding improvements.
- A relatively small number of pupils join the school in Year 7 below the national average level of attainment. In previous years, they have made progress in line with other pupils nationally but not as well as higher prior attainers in the school. As teaching and learning improve across the school, school leaders know that the challenge is to ensure that lower prior-attainers profit from these improvements as much as other pupils. Lower prior attaining pupils are not always able to think about and articulate the next steps in their learning without support.
- Governors and school leaders have been successful in ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils. For example, they have retained an option for a small number of key stage 4 pupils to undertake a non-GCSE land-based course at a local college. While this reduces the school's published results it does successfully meet the needs of this group, who go on to study the courses at a higher level when they leave school.
- Sixth form leaders are taking effective action to reverse the fall in results of previous years. They have put in place rigorous improvement plans in those subjects where performance was weaker. Improvements in the quality of teaching in these areas are evident. They have also ensured that students' progress is closely monitored and those who are not reaching their potential are provided with the necessary support. Students are appreciative of the balance of academic and pastoral support they receive.
- The standards achieved in some subjects, for example performing arts and religious studies, were significantly lower than that in English and mathematics in the recent past. Leaders have put in place a robust structure, which supports underachieving areas and holds middle leaders to account for the improvements they are making. Senior and middle leaders both value the process and are able to demonstrate improvements to the quality of teaching in the areas identified. They also both understand that some variation remains and that underperformance has not yet been entirely addressed.
- A significant factor in the improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been the approach leaders and teachers have taken to assessing

pupils' work. The expectation that teachers and pupils share their thinking with each other about pupils' work is embedded across the school. Pupils in key stage 3 understand the new assessment system the school has introduced and how it helps them to improve. Pupils in key stage 4 have a good understanding of GCSE assessment requirements, and this helps them to maximise their progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to raise the quality of teaching so that lower prior attaining pupils can maximise their potential
- continue to address variations in outcomes and quality of teaching between subjects so that pupils achieve as well in all subjects as they do in the best.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, Ofsted inspector Sheila Crew and I met with you, senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils. We visited lessons to observe learning and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including safeguarding, attendance and the use of the pupil premium funding. We took into account 140 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, 186 written comments by parents and responses to questionnaires completed by 284 pupils and 92 staff.