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Mrs Fiona Brownsey
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Anderton
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Dear Mrs Brownsey

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Anderton

Following my visit to the school on 21 January 2016, 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 November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your colleagues have effectively steered the school through a period of change and have built on its strengths. Nearly all parents are appreciative of the way in which you, as the new headteacher, are maintaining standards and in particular taking appropriate actions to address their concerns over mixed-age teaching in Key Stage 2.

Standards of attainment have remained high in all key stages, particularly in writing and mathematics, because of the good quality of teaching and effective guidance that pupils receive.

Many other schools benefit from access to the expertise of your staff because of the outward-facing work undertaken by the school. Your deputy headteacher has a significant role supporting the local authority in ensuring the consistency of assessment in Key Stage 1 across schools, and your subject leader for mathematics is involved in a national initiative to develop and share good practice in the mastery of mathematics in the locality.

Through rigorous evaluation of the school's work, you have identified quickly and accurately areas for improvement and have lost no time in taking action to secure improvement. For example, in Key Stage 2, you have amended assessment procedures to sharpen the accuracy of teachers' assessments in reading.

Additionally, you recognise that you have in your staff high levels of expertise and some potential future school leaders. Consequently, you have rightly prioritised the development of a more distributed leadership structure that gives more opportunity for these middle leaders to apply and enhance their knowledge and skills to have the best impact on pupils' achievement.

The provision for children in early years, an area for development in the previous inspection, has improved and consequently outcomes in 2015 were well above the national average in 2014. You have improved outdoor provision for children in Reception through well-judged investment in new resources and additional skilled staff. This gives children unimpeded, safe access to many stimulating and engaging activities and helps them reach a good level of development. Leadership in the early years is stronger because staff have completed appropriate training and applied the skills they have learned. Children's learning is carefully planned and well structured. Teaching assistants know what is expected of them and contribute to assessing children's achievement. Assessment in early years is sharp and accurate. New developments in the way children's achievement is recorded allow both teachers and parents to more easily see the progress children are making in numeracy, literacy and the wider curriculum.

Governors have a good understanding of the school because they visit regularly. They share a common vision for the continued improvement of the school with leaders, staff and pupils. Governors hold you to account for the impact of your actions through regular and robust challenges at meetings. Governors have not ensured that the school's website contains all the required information; however, they have actions in place to address these omissions quickly.

Pupils' behaviour in all year groups reflects the school's positive ethos; pupils are excellent ambassadors of the school. Behaviour and conduct about the school are impressive. Pupils are smart and well mannered, welcoming visitors to their classrooms both verbally and in sign language. Pupils were keen to share what they were learning. They demonstrate pride in their school and in their achievements, as seen in the quality of the presentation of their work in most books. Older pupils, after having 'qualified' in food handling, take an active role in helping to serve lunches to others, while other pupils look after younger pupils during lunchtime. Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary; in one mathematics lesson, pupils were enthralled by the challenge of undertaking difficult mental calculations exploring the power of 10 and were confident to explain their methods and reasoning in a precise and logical way.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding meet the most recent legislative requirements. The school has robust procedures for checking the suitability of staff and volunteers working with children. Records show that leaders take effective action to address any safeguarding concerns, including through their close liaison with external agencies. Staff are vigilant to protect pupils from dangers, including those posed by radicalisation and extremism, because they receive appropriate and up-to-date training. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including whilst online, and know who to talk to if they have

any concerns. Pupils say there is very little bullying or bad behaviour and any occurrence is quickly and effectively dealt with by staff. Pupils say that they feel safe and welcome in school and that they enjoy the challenge of learning.

Inspection findings

- You were appointed headteacher in September 2015, taking over from your deputy headteacher who was acting headteacher in the term preceding your appointment. Together you have established an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. As a result, your school development plan contains the appropriate priorities for further improvement, including the continued enhancement of the role of middle leaders. In the short time that you have been headteacher, you have recognised the expertise of teachers in school and used it effectively to enhance the teaching of mathematics and writing, as well as the accuracy of assessment. Actions have been swift and quickly embedded in most classes. As a result, standards of attainment and rates of progress are improving in most subjects. You also recognise, as a result of your rigorous monitoring, that further action may be necessary to ensure the quality of teaching is consistently at its best.
- Some subject leaders have a positive impact outside the school through involvement with the local authority to lead professional development programmes or through involvement in developing national initiatives.
- Governors take their responsibilities as links to specific subjects or classes seriously. They hold meetings regularly with teachers to find out what is going on and often participate in class events. Governors then report their experiences and observations to the full governing body. Consequently, governors are well informed and able to hold you to account. Governors have not ensured that the school's website contains all the required detail to meet regulations. Governors have, however, acted quickly to put in place steps to make the required amendments and address this shortcoming.
- Attendance overall is high and above that seen nationally. Pupils' responses to the online questionnaire were highly positive, and the pupils I spoke to confirmed that they like coming to school. A small number of pupils, however, do not attend as regularly as they should. Leaders are aware of these pupils' individual circumstances and are taking appropriate and effective actions to ensure that they come to school as often as possible. Consequently, attendance rates continue to improve.
- The overall quality of teaching in school has improved, although some inconsistencies in quality remain in lower Key Stage 2. Here there are instances where school policies are not followed as leaders expect, for example in the marking of pupils' work or the teaching of writing.

- The teaching of writing, particularly in Key Stage 2, is generally very effective because skills, including those relating to grammar, spelling and punctuation, are taught systematically. Pupils' work shows that they make rapid progress and develop a wide and rich vocabulary. For example, a Year 5 pupil wrote a poem as a variation that built on the first verse of *The Listeners* by Walter de la Mare. In this independent piece of work, the pupil wrote: "Will anyone come down?" questioned the traveller, "Tell them I kept my will", / But no one descended to the traveller, Where he stood perplexed and still'. This response, among others, showed a mature understanding of the style and metre of the poem.
- Pupils make strong progress in mathematics, particularly in upper Key Stage 2, because of the quality of teaching they receive, especially from the subject leader who has a strong passion for the subject. Pupils are frequently encouraged to undertake difficult mathematical investigations as a regular part of their lessons. Tasks are effectively used to match challenges to pupils' understanding and develop their mastery in the subject. As a result, attainment is high and progress is better than that seen nationally.
- Progress in reading slowed in 2015 to be in line with national expectations. Your detailed analysis of results and further investigations resulted in a review of teaching methods and the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Teachers' assessments were in some cases over-generous. Appropriate actions to improve the quality and accuracy of teachers' assessments of reading, including additional training in the use of a wider range of evidence and more frequent sharing of teachers' assessments to check their accuracy, are bringing about rapid improvements. You recognise, however, that further work may be necessary to ensure that all teachers make best use of these new assessment strategies to inform their teaching and have the best impact on pupils' progress.
- Outcomes for children in early years are strong. In 2015, almost nine out of 10 children made good progress from their starting points to achieve a good level of development. This impressive outcome was due to the high quality of teaching they received. Early years provision has improved because leadership has been strengthened by appropriate training and the effective use of external support from the local authority. Early years staff share detailed planning at regular departmental meetings and this ensures that staff know what is expected of them. Leaders have purchased additional resources and employed extra staffing. Consequently, better use is made of the outdoors to support learning. Staff make accurate assessments of what children can do and use these to shape the planning of activities. New methods of recording assessment evidence focus sharply on literacy, numeracy and the wider curriculum. Consequently, teachers, leaders and parents can see more easily the progress children are making over time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils, particularly those in Key Stage 2, accelerate further their rates of progress, particularly in reading, to match the progress seen in writing by:
 - eliminating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in lower Key Stage 2
 - ensuring that actions to sharpen the accuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' achievement in reading are fully embedded and effectively used to inform teaching
- the governing body has effective systems in place to check that the content of the school's website meets requirements.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, teaching staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors. I also met with the local authority's adviser linked with the school and a representative of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool. I spoke with pupils during lessons, around the school and in meetings. I took account of the written responses from parents and the information contained in responses to online questionnaires for pupils, parents and staff. I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and look at their work. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and at the school's self-evaluation and action plans. I conducted a full review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, risk assessments, training, recruitment checks and record-keeping. I also looked at the provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational or medical needs.