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Ms D Carbon
Principal
St John Fisher Catholic Primary School
Sandy Lane West
Littlemore
Oxford
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Dear Ms Carbon

Short inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, Littlemore

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 October 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 you joined the school in January 2014, you have established a caring and open community where positive relationships prevail. You have made it your priority to get to know pupils, parents and staff and to impress on them that the school belongs to them, not you. To this end you have welcomed and encouraged parents to involve themselves in school life and provided them with valuable guidance and 'hands on' activities to support their children's learning. As a result, pupils are keen to learn and appreciate what they are taught.

Your open, inclusive approach is extended to how you work with staff. You have empowered them to take responsibility and lead improvement. As one member of staff explained, 'The new leadership has allowed me and trusted me to take risks and use creative ways to teach, that are appropriate for the children in my care.'

Since the previous inspection, standards at key stage 2 have improved in reading and writing. An increasing proportion of pupils achieve a good level of development in the early years. You have a clear understanding of the school's performance and use this to make well-judged improvements to teaching. You quickly realised that pupils were not doing well enough in mathematics. Consequently, you are rightly focusing your attention on improving pupils' mathematical skills and understanding through better teaching. As a result, pupils have a renewed enthusiasm for mathematics learning and they are making good progress.

School leaders and governors have worked well to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report for the predecessor school. You have ensured that pupils are given useful feedback about how they are doing and how they can improve. Governors use their comprehensive knowledge of the school and its community to challenge leaders effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders demonstrate a robust approach to making sure that pupils are safe. Your work with other agencies is effective and you show perseverance in following up any concerns you have to make sure pupils and their families get the help they need. Staff are well trained, including about how to keep pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough and well managed. You and your staff share information about pupils effectively, so you know quickly if several pieces of information build up to a picture of concern that you need to follow up. Pupils told me they feel safe at school and well cared for by staff. They talked confidently and enthusiastically with me about the ways staff keep them safe and teach them about potential dangers.

Inspection findings

- The quality of teaching has improved, and continues to improve, as a result of the actions taken by you, other leaders and governors. You regularly check how well pupils are progressing through visits to classes, looking at pupils' work and ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Leaders use this information to identify accurately areas for improvement and find new ways of working to quicken progress.
- You swiftly recognised that pupils' achievement in mathematics wasn't good enough and that their mathematics skills were weaker than other aspects of their learning. You and other leaders are taking decisive and uncompromising action to remedy any weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics. Teachers and teaching assistants benefit from targeted training and support. As a result, teachers plan lessons that more closely match pupils' needs. Tasks are designed to deepen pupils' understanding of mathematical ideas and give them opportunities to apply their skills to solve problems. Consequently, groups of pupils who have not done as well as they should, including girls and the most able, are now making good progress. However, teachers' explanations of mathematical ways of working are sometimes not detailed or clear enough, so pupils struggle to apply these methods when they work on their own and this slows their progress.
- You have wisely taken action to distribute and develop leadership responsibilities across the school. These teachers rise to the challenge and embrace these opportunities. They have benefited from valuable training and support and contribute effectively to school improvement. For example, the work of the literacy leader with Edge Hill University through the 'Every Child Writes' project has helped to bring about improved pupil progress in writing. The early years leader is ensuring that staff have opportunities to share and develop each other's practice effectively.

- You are proactive in developing useful links with other schools both locally and across the Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company. You have not waited for others to approach you. You have used this partnership work effectively to develop middle leaders and to enable teachers to work together to check the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' work.
- Pupils make good progress in reading. This is a result of sharply focused reading sessions and well organised phonics teaching (the sounds that letters and words make).
- The increasing opportunities for independent, extended writing are benefiting all pupils. Different groups of pupils, including boys and disadvantaged pupils, are making good progress. The school's work to develop pupils' language and communication skills, and in particular their vocabulary, helps pupils to speak and then to write in imaginative and creative ways.
- Children make strong progress in the early years. They enter the school with skills that are generally lower than those typical for their age, particularly in communication and language. Adults' enthusiasm, high-quality interactions and positive relationships with children create an environment where children can be inquisitive and grow in confidence. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has increased steadily over the last three years. Inspection evidence confirms that about two thirds of children are on track to achieve this standard this year, which is in line with national figures.
- You have worked effectively to improve the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. As a result of close working with parents, staff know and plan for these pupils' needs well. Additionally, improvements in the overall quality of teaching mean these pupils make at least good progress, similar to their peers.
- Pupils value the education the school provides. They enjoy coming to school and engage in their learning readily and enthusiastically. This is because there is a culture of high expectations, support and love of learning that you, staff and governors have created. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about moving on to secondary school.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of their individual targets and know how to improve their work. This is because they receive detailed and helpful feedback from their teachers. As a result, pupils understand how they are improving over time and are rightly proud of their achievements.
- Parents who I spoke to during this inspection were keen to express their appreciation for the school. They believe their children are making good progress because of good teaching. You and your staff have worked hard to involve parents in the school's work, for example through sharing assemblies and parental workshops. Parents particularly appreciate the approachable manner you and your staff have, and the helpful advice they receive to support their children's learning. These positive views are reflected in the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Governors are committed and active in sustaining the school's success. New governors have added valuable skills and expertise to the profile of the academy committee. Governors are not afraid to challenge senior leaders and do so with a secure knowledge and understanding of the school and its community. Governors recognise that changes to the school's new

assessment systems mean that they need further training in order to continue to challenge leaders effectively about pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to improve pupils' progress in mathematics by providing clear explanations of mathematical ways of working, so that pupils can apply these successfully when they tackle their own work
- governors' skills are developed further to enable them to fully understand the school's performance information, in order to continue to challenge leaders effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy committee, the director of education for the archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Moore
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders, a group of pupils, the chair of the academy committee, and a representative of the Dominic Barberi multi academy company. I visited parts of six lessons with you. I looked at pupils' work, in particular a sample of mathematics and writing books. I took account of the 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the six responses to the pupil survey and 12 responses to the staff questionnaire. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day and spent time with pupils on the playground at breaktime. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, safeguarding checks and leaders' checks on the quality of teaching.