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Mrs Michelle Forrest
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Dear Mrs Forrest

Short inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 June 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 January of this year you have wasted no time in identifying accurately the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have used this information to put in place plans and actions for improvement that have built effectively upon your predecessor's work. You and other senior leaders have quickly established a positive working relationship, underpinned by a strong sense of teamwork. Alongside governors, you share and promote highly ambitious aspirations for the pupils at the school.

Pupils are proud of their school and speak confidently in praise of their teachers, who they hold in high regard. As one pupil explained, 'Our teachers do everything they can to help us, they work really hard.' Pupils across the school are eager to learn and grasp the opportunities that their teachers provide. In every classroom that I visited during my inspection, pupils' behaviour and respect for each other ensured that learning moved forward without interruption.

Areas for improvement, identified at the previous inspection, have been addressed. The use of clear success criteria, increasingly devised by pupils themselves, is helping to make sure that there is greater challenge and higher expectations of what pupils can achieve in their writing. Pupils use these clear guidelines to check the progress and quality of their own work, thereby taking greater responsibility for

their learning. Further actions taken by leaders, including the appointment of a specialist English teacher, have also contributed to improvements in the quality of writing. As a result, the standards that pupils attained in writing in 2015, by the time they left Year 6, were substantially above those seen at the time of the previous inspection.

The lack of consistency in the quality of marking was also an area of improvement identified at the previous inspection. In the books that we examined together, it is clear that in most classes, teachers are following the school marking and feedback policy. In mathematics, for example, it is evident that many pupils use teachers' comments to address misconceptions and deepen their learning. However, some variability remains. In a small number of books that we scrutinised, the school policy was not being followed as intended, so feedback did not have the same positive impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

In a recent questionnaire, 100% of parents stated that their children were kept safe at the school. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records I examined during my visit, such as reports of serious incidents (including bullying) or pupil accidents, are detailed and show appropriate responses by leaders. Checks on adults, to ensure their suitability to work with children, are carried out thoroughly. However, I suggested some minor administrative changes to these records to show very clearly that the checks have been undertaken.

Senior leaders hold frequent meetings to review any concerns about pupils, enabling them to put in place quickly actions to ensure that all pupils are kept safe. Governors also take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. They check that all staff have undertaken appropriate and relevant training, and commission an annual safeguarding audit to confirm that this aspect of the schools work is effective.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders and governors have an accurate and detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use this information well to develop and implement clear plans for improvement. Leaders took swift action following a dip in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) screening check in 2014. This resulted in a rapid improvement so that in 2015 standards were in line with the national average.
- As the newly appointed headteacher, you and other senior leaders are highly ambitious for the pupils. Recently introduced procedures for leaders to discuss pupils' progress with teachers are robustly followed up with plans for action to make sure that every pupil makes the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders use checks on pupils' work and observations of learning to hold teachers to account. Feedback to teachers is clear and outlines areas for improvement as well as highlighting strengths. Most teachers respond

quickly to the advice and support that they are given. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve across the school.

- Governors use their broad range of skills to effectively hold leaders to account for their actions. They are involved fully in devising plans to develop the school and use these well as a yardstick to check that improvements are on track and are having a positive impact. They make good use of external consultants to quality assure leaders' work and to be sure they have an accurate view of the school. In collaboration with leaders, they have successfully brokered local authority support. This year, for example, leaders secured local authority funding to employ a specialist mathematics teacher.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. The foundations for many of the strengths seen across the school are laid in the Reception class. In a mathematics lesson, for instance, children demonstrated their excellent social and communication skills as they worked well together to develop their understanding of money in their role play area. Well-planned, purposeful and interesting activities ignite children's interest so that they sustain their concentration and learning moves forward effectively. In 2015 the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was above the national average.
- The teaching of phonics is now a strength of the school. Leaders have tackled successfully the 2014 fall in standards. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully to ensure that any gaps in their knowledge and understanding are addressed swiftly. During my visit a group of more-able pupils in Year 1 made good progress when their teacher challenged them to apply their newly acquired skills by writing sentences containing the words 'suspicious' and 'ferocious'.
- Leaders have correctly identified that the progress that pupils make in mathematics has not been as strong as in other subjects, particularly for the pupils who grasp concepts quickly. A range of actions, including the appointment of a specialist mathematics teacher and focused training for staff, is beginning to pay dividends. Evidence in books shows that teachers are providing greater levels of challenge for the most-able pupils. In some classes, teachers use problem-solving activities which deepen pupils' mathematical understanding. However, in some classes, there are not enough opportunities to think deeply about mathematical ideas.
- The use of specialist teachers in other subjects is enhancing pupils' learning. Pupils in Year 5, for example, developed their communication skills well when using multimedia tablets to produce book reviews. Furthermore, specialist sports coaches teach high-quality physical education and also support the professional development of the school staff who teach alongside them.
- Information provided by the school shows that disadvantaged pupils' progress is at least in line with that of other pupils. Governors ask leaders challenging questions to check that the funding received for disadvantaged pupils is spent wisely and improves their learning and progress.
- In all years, pupils work collaboratively to develop and deepen their

learning. They listen respectfully to each other's opinions and use their discussions very well to think about what they are learning. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, for instance, pupils' understanding of area and perimeter increased as they discussed the challenging problems their teacher set.

- Pupils' good behaviour is a strength of the school. In all lessons observed, behaviour was of a high standard, demonstrating pupils' thirst for learning
- Pupils' respect adults and respond to their instructions quickly and with maturity. Pupils' report that on the rare occasions when there is unkind name calling on the playground, adults deal with it swiftly and effectively.
- Pupils' are proud of their school, their teachers and each other. As one pupil stated, 'We all shine.'
- The school has established good links with the local secondary school to support pupils' transition into key stage 3. Each week, for example, a teacher from the secondary school teaches French at St John Fisher.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers give pupils of all abilities frequent opportunities to deepen and apply their mathematical skills to problem-solving and reasoning activities.

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 Knowsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, a group of eight pupils, members of the governing body and the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I scrutinised documents including the school development plan, safeguarding checks, minutes of meetings and records of accidents and serious incidents (including bullying) and checks on the quality of teaching. I also visited every classroom with you to speak to pupils, look at their books and observe their learning. I took account of 18 staff responses and four pupil responses to the to the online Ofsted questionnaires. I also considered 50 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as responses to the school's own recent parent questionnaire. I also spoke to a small number of parents at the end of the school day.