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Mrs Sharon Mason
Headteacher
St Chad's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Mason

Short inspection of St Chad's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school. Following the conversion to academy status, you restructured the leadership team to strengthen the school's capacity for improvement. There have been significant changes to staffing, particularly in early years and key stage 1. It is testament to your drive for the best-quality teaching in all classes, coupled with the highly committed staff team, that standards remain above average. You have established a culture of professional learning and continual improvement across the school. Staff share this vision and value the opportunities they have to learn from leaders, from each other and from outstanding practice in other schools.

The school has a caring community and inclusive ethos. Leaders and staff model the values that are at the heart of the school – respect, care and cooperation. As a result, relationships in school are strong. There is a caring and nurturing culture in which every child is encouraged to flourish. Comments from parents include, 'I can't thank the staff enough for how they care for and nurture our children.' and 'The school goes the extra mile to help children who need extra support. They never give up on a child.'

You have prioritised the development of early years, in the light of weaknesses which you identified in this phase. Staff working in the Reception class meet with colleagues from local schools to ensure that they are making secure judgements about children's learning. They have opportunities to learn from outstanding practice

in other early years settings. The changes have revitalised teaching and the use of assessment in the Reception class. Consequently, staff are better at recognising and planning for the 'next steps' in children's learning. A higher-than-average proportion of children who completed Reception achieved a good level of development in 2015. Nevertheless, the early years leader is not complacent. She has identified areas that need further improvement, such as boys' writing and children's use of technology. These continue to be addressed as priorities.

You and the staff have addressed the need for the school to improve the quality of teachers' marking and to broaden the range and scope of the curriculum effectively. You have introduced a new marking policy. Staff have worked hard to ensure that it is used consistently and effectively. Pupils value teachers' marking. They understand and can clearly explain how it helps them to improve their work.

You have made considerable strides in improving the curriculum. Pupils are proud of school awards, for example the National Music Mark and sports awards. Staff plan many opportunities for pupils to create and explore topics of interest. Work in books and attractive displays around the school, such as the Stone Age cave paintings and Victorian posters, are a testimony to this. One pupil commented, 'We made our cave paintings with sticks and berries from the ground because we wanted them to be real. You see, in the Stone Age there wasn't proper paint.' Pupils make good progress and develop a love of learning as a result of these activities.

While proud of your successes, you and your colleagues are acutely aware of the areas where there is further work to be done. The school's improvement plans focus on appropriate priorities. For example, you recognise that pupils need more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to a range of problems and develop mathematical reasoning. The school has purchased new resources and organised training to support staff with this. The most recent information shows that the actions taken are making a difference to pupils' confidence and mathematical reasoning across the school. However, you recognise that improvement plans lack timescales and specific criteria for measuring success. As a result, leaders, including academy committee members, cannot easily check how well and how quickly actions are helping the school to meet key priorities and further improve outcomes for pupils.

Members of the academy committee are supportive of the school and aware that they need to challenge leaders and hold them to account. However, they rely too heavily on the headteacher for information about the achievement of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. This hinders their ability to independently evaluate the school's performance, raise questions or increase the level of challenge if appropriate.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' safety is regarded as paramount in school and as everyone's responsibility. Records show that staff are vigilant and take an active approach to safeguarding children. Leaders respond swiftly to any concerns and are committed to working

closely with external agencies in the best interests of the children. Parents, staff and pupils are united in their view that pupils are safe in school.

A member of the academy committee takes a clear lead in ensuring that pupils are kept safe in school. She ensures that the school's safeguarding arrangements meet the current statutory requirements. She formally monitors this aspect of the school's work termly and reports back to the academy board. You and the deputy headteacher hold recently updated safeguarding training qualifications. You ensure that staff are aware of the current national legislation on preventing extremism. All staff receive appropriate safeguarding training. All of those that I spoke to were clear about what they should do if they have any concerns.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas needing development. However, you recognise that improvement plans do not include specific criteria to help the school to measure the impact of actions taken or timescales by which improvements should be seen. Therefore, leaders, including academy committee members, cannot check the extent to which, and how quickly, the school is making progress towards key priorities.
- Staff have regular opportunities to learn from each other and from schools in the North Dudley Learning Partnership and St John Bosco Catholic Academy Trust. One teacher commented, 'It's good to see how other schools work. We learn as much as we can and adapt things to fit our needs and our children.' This contributes to a culture of continued professional learning.
- Leaders have worked closely with staff to implement new approaches to assessment across the school. You have organised effective training and external support to ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' achievements are accurate in all key stages. Pupils have appropriate targets to help them to improve. Targets are based on teachers' accurate assessment and good knowledge of every pupil.
- Your robust focus on improving the accuracy of assessments in the early years has been effective. Staff observe children's learning carefully and use information to provide children with challenging activities that take their learning forward. You recognise that further work needs to be done to secure these improvements.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress. The leader of this area has established clear systems to ensure that activities and resources are well directed to meet pupils' needs. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together. Additional staff are well trained and effectively deployed.
- You have re-organised the way that phonics (the sounds that letters make) is taught in Years 1 and 2. The academy committee has provided funding for new resources to support phonics teaching. Early reading books have been updated. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2015 was above the national average.

- Increasing numbers of pupils enter Year 1 at a good level of development. You have rightly prioritised the need to use the new and developing assessment system in key stage 1 to ensure that children continue to make good progress as they move through Years 1 and 2.
- Pupils leaving Year 6 reach standards that are above the national average in reading and mathematics. Standards are well above the national average in writing. However, you recognise that there is more work to be done to further improve this. Your recent focus on letter formation, handwriting and presentation has had a positive impact. Pupils are proud of the work in their books and on display in classrooms and corridors.
- The academy committee has worked hard to maintain the school's unique character, values and ethos. Members of the committee visit the school regularly. They know the children and the staff well. School leaders at all levels provide reports to help them to understand school developments. However, the committee members do not have a secure, independent understanding of the information on pupils' achievement, particularly the achievement of different groups of pupils. This limits their ability to accurately evaluate the school's progress against key priorities and offer an appropriate level of challenge.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's improvement plans have clear timescales and specific criteria, so that leaders, including academy committee members, can easily check the extent to which the school is meeting key priorities and further improving outcomes for pupils
- academy committee members develop a secure, independent understanding of pupils' achievement, particularly the achievement of different groups of pupils, so that they can accurately evaluate the school's progress against key priorities and offer an appropriate level of challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held meetings with you, senior leaders, teachers and five academy committee members. This included the chair and the vice chair of the academy committee, who are also members of the academy board. You accompanied me on visits to all classes. I spoke to pupils in classrooms and around the school and met with a group of pupils. I examined and discussed a range of documentation, including samples of pupils' work, information about pupils' achievement, the school's improvement plans and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I considered the views of 16 parents who wrote to me during the inspection and 19 parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.