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Mrs Helen Hayes
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hayes

Short inspection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 July 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 school is poised to embark on a new chapter after a period of sadness and change. The school and its community experienced sorrow in the last two years: the previous long-serving headteacher became ill and took early retirement, but died last September. At first, two assistant headteachers, supported by a governor who used to be a primary headteacher, kept the 'ship steady', ensuring that the day-to-day work of the school did not falter. The diocese then helped to secure your appointment as executive headteacher. You divide your time between Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St John Fisher RC Primary Schools. Recently, the governing body from St John Fisher has agreed a two-year extension of this arrangement. This means that the impetus you are injecting into checking and improving the school's work can continue, enabling the school to move forwards and build on its good reputation.

The school continues to be friendly and welcoming to all – pupils, staff, governors and visitors. Good relationships, underpinned by a strong sense of caring and respect for one another, enable pupils to thrive, including those who join the school part-way through their primary education. No pupil has been excluded for the last few years. Pupils' behaviour during the inspection was excellent – I was struck by the interest and concentration shown by all pupils, including the youngest children, and how well they listened to each other and their teachers. They were keen to play an active part in lessons. This was an area for improvement at the last inspection and is something the school has worked on successfully. A marriage of the school's strong Christian ethos and promotion of British values through 'the five Ws (welcome, welfare, witness, word and worship)' helps to equip pupils with the knowledge and personal attributes they need to flourish in their future lives. The

Year 6 pupils who talked to me showed ready acceptance and an understanding tinged with curiosity about those whose lives and choices may differ from their own. The school's track record of above-average standards in national Year 6 tests has faltered a little in the last couple of years. This is due in part to a legacy of weaker teaching earlier in key stage 2, which has now been sorted out. Results of the new Year 6 tests, hot off the press, are around the national average overall. Reading is really strong, while standards in writing and mathematics have dipped a bit. We discussed your plans to improve these aspects. It is important to say, though, that being in Year 6, as in the rest of the school, is not just about learning English and mathematics. Pupils enjoy all their subjects and taking part in a range of extra-curricular activities, sports and visits. During the afternoon of the inspection, Year 6 pupils were rehearsing for the following week's performances of 'The Wizard of Oz'.

Results of assessments at the end of key stage 1 have risen steadily over the last few years. Phonics is led and taught well. Most pupils reached the expected standard in the phonics test in Year 1 in 2015, with all the remaining pupils succeeding at the second attempt in Year 2. Standards are also rising in the early years foundation stage, but not as fast as they are rising nationally, and need to be better.

Improving the quality of teaching was another area for improvement from the last inspection. You have rightly supported and challenged teachers to ensure that they teach consistently well. Teachers have increased the level of challenge for high attainers and involved pupils more in their learning. While records of monitoring of teaching identify good features and what needs to improve, not enough attention is given to the subject being taught and teachers' skills in teaching that subject well.

In my discussions with you and the deputy headteacher, it was clear that you both have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and how to tackle them. Improvement planning is now based on accurate self-evaluation – an area for development from the previous inspection. The ambition you both have for making the school as good as possible for everyone in it is palpable, and is shared by governors and staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements. The culture that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility is well established and taken very seriously. Appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited, and checks are made on those volunteers who will visit the school regularly, for instance to read with pupils. Staff and governors are well trained in child protection. They ensure that pupils are taught how to keep safe, including when they are online. The new electronic gates have ensured that the site is secure. Staff have completed relevant training on the 'Prevent' duty so that the school community is alert to the potential dangers of extremism. Everyone understands the steps to be taken in the event of any concerns being raised.

All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that the school is a safe place to be, as did the pupils with whom I spoke and nearly all the parents who completed the parent questionnaire. Evidence gathered during the inspection did not give any cause for concern for pupils' safety.

Inspection findings

- Many of the strengths in the school's work have been maintained over the four years since the school's last inspection. Work to address the areas for improvement has met with some success. Teaching and learning are more vibrant, with pupils taking more responsibility for their learning, including in how they are involved in the use of targets to keep track of their progress. Checks by senior leaders are more rigorous and better guide self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- You have identified that a few aspects of the school's work are not as good as they could be and, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and governing body, have taken action to tackle them. Your raised expectations of staff for the quality of their teaching, and their leadership roles have led to some changes in teachers' roles and some absence and turnover of teaching staff. One class was particularly affected by successive changes in their teacher. Your decision that this class will continue with their current permanent teacher next year is sensible.
- You drew on external support to review provision and leadership of the early years foundation stage. Weaknesses were identified and some improvements made, for example by making activities more 'boy-friendly', which resulted in more boys reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Literacy remains the area of learning in which children do least well. In part, this relates to the school's increasing proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language, which is most marked in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- A new leader for the early years foundation stage takes up her responsibility in September 2016 with an understanding that she has some issues to tackle. Currently, there is not enough clarity about how children will learn through the planned adult-led and child-initiated activities. Also, while the outdoor space is now used more often, its potential for supporting imaginative play and learning is not exploited fully.
- Although standards at the end of key stage 2 fell in 2015, analysis of pupils' performance in the tests shows that many pupils made at least the expected progress from starting points that were more often lower than usual for Year 6 in this school. Early analysis of the results of the 2016 Year 6 tests, which assess the new national curriculum, shows that disadvantaged pupils outperformed their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics. As well as extra academic support, these pupils benefited from a range of support including specialist counselling from a charity and relaxation techniques.

- The school is at a transitional stage in how it tracks pupils' progress. Data based on the old system shows all year groups to be making at least the expected progress and often good progress. The new system is based on a four-point scale, with roughly two thirds of pupils reaching securely the more demanding national expected standard. Most others are working towards it, with a few exceeding it.
- The scrutiny of pupils' writing that you, the two senior leaders and I carried out showed that pupils' writing in subjects other than English tended to be of a lower standard than their writing in English, although we saw some good writing in religious education. Sometimes this was because the tasks pupils were set expected very short or superficial written responses and therefore did not encourage pupils to write as well as they could. You could see that this shows teachers are missing opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills further, and indicated you intend to act on this.
- In mathematics, you are considering adopting a Singaporean approach to teaching to strengthen the aim of teaching for mastery. You and I saw pupils enjoying learning mathematics. Year 6 pupils all gasped with wonder when their teacher showed them a completed spiral pattern before they went on to draw their own. In other classes, pupils sometimes struggled because they were trying to apply a method without understanding properly why it worked, or because their knowledge of geometric properties of shapes was weak. Work in Year 6 pupils' books showed that they have some good opportunities to solve problems, reason and investigate. Other classes have some similar activities but they are not used consistently successfully to promote the best learning. I spotted occasional slips in teachers' marking, comments and use of rules such as 'move the decimal point when dividing or multiplying by 10'. These point to possible gaps in teachers' subject knowledge or their expertise in developing pupils' understanding of concepts and methods using practical apparatus, models and images.
- You are ably supported by the deputy headteacher and governors. Staff are positive about the stability and reinvigorated drive that you have brought to the school. Responses to the staff questionnaire were 100% positive. You have made good use of professional development opportunities to enable teachers and leaders to further their skills, for instance through the 'outstanding teacher' and senior leadership programmes. Some sharing of good practice across the two primary schools is also proving beneficial. The local authority's officer suggested that links with local subject specialist leaders of education might help teachers develop their subject leadership roles further.
- Governors bring a wide range of expertise and educational experience to the governing body that is used to good effect to support the school. The chair of the governing body and other governors visit regularly and talk with groups of pupils. They are knowledgeable about the school's work, for instance in how pupil premium funding supports disadvantaged pupils. Minutes of meetings show that governors ask suitable questions to check on

the school's work and to steer its way forward. The governing body makes sure that external support from the local authority, the school's improvement partner and the diocese is used effectively, for instance in developing middle leaders' skills.

- The governing body has not ensured that the school's new website contains all the information that would enable the school to meet statutory requirements. Some documents were uploaded during the inspection. The governing body should check that this new information is fully compliant. Remaining areas to include are curriculum information about what pupils will learn in subjects (other than English and mathematics which are already provided for) and information about the impact of primary physical education and sport premium funding.

Next steps for the school

- Improve provision in the early years foundation stage so that more children reach a good level of development.
- Strengthen teaching and learning further by focusing on the important subject-specific features, ensuring that all subject leaders are well equipped to help develop their colleagues' expertise.
- Ensure that the school's website meets statutory requirements in the information it provides.

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher (who leads on mathematics and English) to discuss the school's self-evaluation and the impact of actions you are taking to improve teaching and raise standards. You accompanied me on a visit to observe teaching and learning in mathematics in Year 6 and on brief visits to classes in Years 1 to 5, where we observed the teaching of phonics, English and mathematics. We each looked at some pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning. The deputy headteacher and I visited the Reception and Nursery classes where we observed focused teaching of mathematics and children working on other activities. We talked with some children about their learning. You, the senior leaders and I looked at a sample of pupils' writing in different subjects, and I looked at a sample of Year 6 pupils' mathematics books. I met with six governors, including the chair of the governing body, and had telephone discussions with a representative of the diocese and a representative of the local authority who has visited the school to monitor its progress. I met with a group of Year 6 pupils. No pupils completed the online questionnaire. I considered 67 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also received letters from a parent and two

pupils. I reviewed the 23 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff. I considered the school's website and various documents including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan, your most recent report to the governing body, and information about the achievement of pupils in school. I considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the checks made on adults working in the school.