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Mrs C Kelly
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kelly

Short inspection of Sacred Heart School, A Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 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 December 2012.

The school became an academy in December 2013. It is governed by the Sacred Heart Hillsborough Academy Trust. The trust is a member of the Diocese of Hallam schools' partnership agreement in which the diocesan bishop approves the appointment of foundation governors. The trust is part of the Our Lady Umbrella Trust, made up of one secondary and five primary schools. These schools work together for procurement purposes and develop common policies.

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 became the headteacher in September 2014 your clear vision and effective actions have brought about improvements in the quality of education. Your changes to the management of the school have created a greater clarity of purpose and clearer direction for staff. You have provided more professional development for staff, better linked to school improvement priorities. Your staff are more outward-looking and leaders constructively research and reflect on approaches to teaching and learning. Middle leaders have clearer responsibilities and are more accountable. Your deputy headteacher and leader for English demonstrate subject expertise and are passionate about improving teaching and learning in mathematics and English.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to set tasks that meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Work in lessons is carefully planned for different groups and is suitably challenging. On occasion, at the beginning of mathematics lessons, the most able spend too long consolidating what they know before getting on with the more challenging task. Teachers and well-trained teaching assistants provide a well-targeted range of additional activities to overcome identified gaps in learning, especially in mathematics.

Progress and attainment in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 were below the provisional national averages in 2016. Effective action is being taken to improve teaching and learning in mathematics to meet the demands of the new national curriculum.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to provide more opportunities for pupils to work independently. This has been achieved by improving the resources for pupils to use in their learning. Better guidance is provided on classroom walls for pupils to refer to. Pupils said they liked being given clues instead of answers. More challenging questions are provided for the most able to solve problems on their own and provide reasoned explanations. Leaders plan to extend the use of purposeful questioning to more subjects, including science, to further develop pupils' thinking skills.

The school was asked to improve communication with parents. The great majority of parents responded positively to the Ofsted online questionnaire and are happy with the school. You have regularly surveyed parents' opinion and acted on suggestions. Your redesigned website presents information well, is user-friendly and provides up-to-date information about what is happening in each class. The parents I spoke to were entirely positive about communication with the school and expressed a high level of satisfaction. Leaders are planning further developments in the way they report to parents.

Pupils are attentive in lessons, well behaved and keen to learn. They are willing to talk and are confident in relating to adults. Attendance remains above average. The school successfully promotes a positive culture for learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff have up-to-date training on safeguarding. Systems for identifying and following up concerns are robust and document communications and actions well. The school works closely with families and acts with care to support pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Communication with other agencies is effective and specialist support is provided from a range of other services. Governors and leaders follow proper procedures when investigating any safeguarding concerns. Admissions, attendance and staff

recruitment registers meet requirements. Pupils said they feel safe because all the adults in school look after them. They talked knowledgeably about the online safety training they receive every year and the road safety training that takes place at this time of year as the nights get darker.

Inspection findings

- You have developed the responsibilities of staff well and strengthened performance management. Improved financial management has enabled you to tackle school priorities more effectively. You have improved the quality of the learning environment, including the use of information and communication technology. You have strengthened links between curriculum subjects and fostered a common approach to teaching and planning. By increasing the proportion of full-time teachers you have improved the continuity of learning.
- Governors appreciate the way you have modernised the school. You keep them well informed and they share your clear focus on school priorities. Governors regularly use data to discuss school performance and understand the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- In Reception, the proportion reaching a good level of development has increased and was above the provisional national average in 2016. This is the result of effective leadership, better resources, a more interesting learning environment, and effective teaching of literacy and mathematics. Plans, but not funding, are in place for further development of the outdoor area.
- Pupils learn to sound and blend letters well as a result of well-focused teaching and effective small-group work led by well-trained teaching assistants. Practical and engaging activities ensure that pupils understand the meaning of words as well as the spelling. Phonics results in Year 1 were above the provisional national average in 2016.
- Weaker pupils are given good support through reading with an adult, and their progress is checked and encouraged well in their reading diaries. Staff regularly read to pupils and pupils often read at home, encouraged by the prize of a book for sustained daily reading. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to read books online as well as to borrow books from school. Pupils develop more advanced reading skills through the well-planned and systematic teaching of key reading skills at key stage 2. The most able make good progress in reading.
- Pupils learn to write in a cursive script from an early stage and this develops their concentration on letter shapes and the links between letters. Pupils present their written and mathematical work well. Pupils are motivated to write by a stimulus which sparks their imagination and helps them to express themselves in words, for example by exploring a spaceship that has crashed in the playground. As a result, they write regularly at length. Pupils extend and consolidate their writing well in other subjects such as religious education and history. Leaders are actively developing pupils' writing in science.
- In the last two years, pupils made at least expected rates of progress at key stage 1. Unvalidated 2016 data suggests that the proportion reaching the expected standard was a little above average in reading and writing and a little below in mathematics.

- In 2016, unvalidated data at key stage 2 suggests that the proportions reaching the expected and high standards were well above average in reading and below average in mathematics. This was due to pupils not fully meeting the demands of the new mathematics curriculum. Mathematical reasoning was the weaker aspect and staff training has already been provided to tackle this. The school has joined a national programme to develop mastery in mathematics in the early years and key stage 1. The new practical resources and structured methods are enabling pupils in these year groups to make good progress in mathematics lessons and to acquire mathematical language. Pupils at key stage 2 value the regular tests to check what they have learned and appreciate the action by teachers to fill the identified gaps in their knowledge. The mathematics leader and teaching assistants are well trained in a range of targeted mathematics programmes which are effectively tackling identified weaknesses in pupils' learning. Evaluations show that these actions are having a positive impact on pupils' progress, including disadvantaged pupils. Effective support and challenge for the most able are provided in Years 5 and 6 by a highly qualified teaching assistant.
- There were at least five disadvantaged pupils in a few year groups last year. In these classes, disadvantaged pupils made greater gains in their learning than other pupils due to the additional support they received, although their attainment remains lower than others.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- actions to improve the teaching of mathematics result in improved progress and attainment at the end of key stage 1 and 2, including by the most able.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hallam, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I pursued the following lines of enquiry:

- What explains the improvement in early years outcomes?
- Why do pupils make good progress in reading and why were mathematics results not as strong in 2016?

- Are tasks suitably challenging for different groups, and are pupils supported and challenged to work independently?
- Are leaders bringing about improvement, do they communicate effectively with parents and is safeguarding effective?

I met with you, senior and middle leaders, support staff, a group of pupils and three members of the governing body who also represented the trust. I also spoke with parents attending a consultation meeting with teachers. I jointly observed teaching with you, and we discussed the learning and pupils' work. I heard pupils read and examined pupils' writing books.

I checked the school's website and examined a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, the raising attainment plan, the attendance and admissions register, and safeguarding records. I took account of 63 responses from parents and 13 responses from staff to Ofsted's online questionnaires.