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Mr David Jobburns
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jobburns

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 2017, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

School leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The quality of teaching continues to be effective and standards in the early years and key stage 1 have risen. In addition, pupils' attendance has improved and their behaviour in lessons and around the school presents a very positive picture. At the end of key stage 2, academic standards in the past have been below age-related expectations although, year after year, progress measures have compared very favourably with national figures. Currently, the improved standards coming up from key stage 1 are helping to push academic standards higher in key stage 2.

Since taking on the headship in September 2016, you have taken steps to build upon the positive legacy left by the previous headteacher. You have made your expectations clear and are doing a good job. You have rightly identified a need to develop middle leadership roles within the school. The governing body also recognises the need to take a more active role in shaping and evaluating the school's improvement strategy.

In recent times, there have been several changes of teaching staff and your current team is capable and keen to improve teaching further. To this end, you plan to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share and learn from effective practice in this and other schools.

In response to the recommendations made by the previous inspection, you have

made considerable progress in developing the early years provision. Teaching in this part of the school has continued to improve and you recently opened a Nursery class. This is helping children to make faster progress during their first years at school and to be better prepared for learning in later years.

Parents express positive views about the school, both in their responses to Parent View and in their comments to me during the inspection. Several parents and governors highlighted the school's worthy values and care for pupils as being particular strengths. Inspection evidence supports these views.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose. Staff and governors keep up to date with current government requirements, and staff with specific responsibilities, such as the designated safeguarding leader or first aiders, receive regular training in order that they can fulfil their duties effectively.

Staff know how to respond to concerns about a child's safety or welfare and do not hesitate to do so when required. School records show that any concerns are logged promptly and followed up appropriately. In fact, this aspect of the school's work is very well organised. Record-keeping is meticulous and liaison with families and other agencies, such as the police, medical services and welfare organisations, is efficient and effective. Pupils who need support are given the attention that they need.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. In school, they are able to use the internet safely and learn respect for themselves and for others. Well-thought-out routines at the beginning and end of the day make sure pupils enter and leave the school in a closely supervised and safe manner. The school site is kept secure and any unexplained pupil absences are followed up swiftly. All the proper checks on staff and visitors are carried out and staff and pupil records are up to date and stored securely.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school and that bullying rarely happens. When conflict or disagreement does occur, pupils and parents report that it is dealt with in a fair and proportionate way. My checks on the school's procedures for responding to pupils' or parents' concerns found all to be in order.

Inspection findings

- In September 2016, you stepped up from your role as deputy headteacher to take on the position of headteacher. You have managed this change well. You have the support of parents, and staff and pupils trust your judgement. They are right to do so. You are open to advice, yet decisive and clear about what needs to be done to make sure the school continues to improve. You have built further on the work of your predecessor and are well aware that you need to develop other leadership roles in the school. Currently, because you have stepped from the deputy role and several new staff have recently started at the school, middle

leadership is underdeveloped. This said, some leaders have been effective in raising standards and improving teaching, particularly in phonics. A key priority is to appoint a new deputy headteacher and to provide staff training to develop the promising talent evident in the staff team. In a similar vein, governance, which has been solid and supportive over time, now needs to think and act more strategically. Currently, the governors' role in forward planning is not as informed or evaluative as it could be. Governors know key headlines about the school's strengths and development areas but lack sufficient knowledge about the details. This limits their ability to evaluate the school's work and the impact of their decisions and to hold senior leaders to account. On a more positive note, governors have taken thoughtful action to ensure that there is effective support for you during your first year in headship and have secured the services of a consultant headteacher to assist you. This support is proving to be beneficial.

- As reported by the previous inspection, many children start school with a level of knowledge and skill below that typical for their age. Some children have limited speaking and listening skills. In response to this, you have taken steps to make sure the early years provision meets their specific needs. You have opened a Nursery class and this is helping to equip children with important basic skills and gets them used to school routines and expectations. Effective teaching and positive attitudes to learning are apparent in both the Nursery and Reception classes. In both classes, children are presented with well-chosen activities that prompt them to collaborate, explore and discover, while also improving their early literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers also make use of topical and relevant events to motivate children. In the Reception class during this inspection, for example, teaching drew on the forecast of snow later in the day to inspire the children to write and also to consider how to release some toy penguins that had become frozen in a block of ice. Both activities prompted some worthwhile language, both in conversation and writing. By providing relevant activities with a focus on key communication skills, teaching in the early years ensures that the majority of children attain a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Year after year, increasing proportions of children have left the early years well prepared for learning in Year 1.
- This trend of improvement in the early years follows through into key stage 1. Standards have risen steadily over the past three years and, in 2016, the proportions of pupils reaching age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics were above national figures. Given pupils' starting points, this is a notable achievement. Again, this is the result of teaching that is well pitched to pupils' learning needs. In Years 1 and 2, pupils get a lot of work done and good progress is evident in their books. Teaching focuses heavily on improving key literacy and numeracy skills and also injects a sense of fun and interest that fires pupils' imaginations. For example, in Year 1, clues left by a mystery visitor were used as a prompt for letter writing. Having got the pupils' keen attention, the teacher then made sure they were absolutely clear about how to write and punctuate a letter. Teaching also made links to their work in phonics and pupils displayed a secure grasp of the work covered. Consequently, the task extended their learning and resulted in a letter that made sense to the reader. At every step of the way, the teacher checked that pupils understood what they were

learning and were keeping up. Given the quality of teaching in key stage 1, and the effective teaching of phonics, it is no surprise that the Year 1 phonics check results have soared to well above the national figures in 2016.

- In key stage 2, teaching builds further on pupils' achievements in key stage 1. Across the key stage, school assessment information and work in books shows that most pupils are making good progress. Some teaching – notably in Year 4 – is particularly strong. Even so, standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 have tended to be below age-related expectations over time. During this inspection, a key line of enquiry was to explore the relationship between strong progress data and below-average academic standards. This is what I discovered: in the main, the strong progress data has been generated by strong key stage 2 teaching that has built on the previously low attainment at the end of key stage 1. As key stage 1 teaching has strengthened and standards at the end of Year 2 have risen, the standards coming up through key stage 2 have also risen. This is evident in the quality of work now being seen in Years 3 and 4. The current challenge for the school is to maintain these strong key stage 2 progress rates so that pupils who start Year 3 at, or above, age-related expectations go on to reach higher standards at the end of Year 6.
- Another improvement has been pupils' attendance. Headline figures for attendance show that it has risen steadily from below average at the time of the previous inspection to above average in 2016. There are several reasons for this. First, you notice and reward regular attendance. Pupils receive weekly, termly and annual awards, and this has made a difference. Last year, for instance, more than 40% of pupils had at least 99% attendance. Second, you challenge unnecessary absence and work with other organisations to support families, when needs be. Where attendance for individuals has been low, you are able to show exactly what you have done and the difference it has made. All in all, your analysis of attendance and absence data cannot be faulted. By taking such an attentive and analytical approach, you have made sure the attendance of all pupils has risen.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop middle leadership by making the most of the talent within the staff team and providing training and support as necessary to further raise standards and improve teaching and learning
- improve governors' role in shaping and evaluating school strategy
- make sure teaching continues to improve by finding ways to share and learn from effective practice in this school and other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the teaching staff. I also met with the school secretary, four governors, and had a telephone conversation with a local authority officer. I carried out short observations of teaching in all classes, observed part of the weekly mass, and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. I talked with pupils in lessons and at lunchtime and heard some pupils read in class. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and received a letter from one parent.

I paid particular attention to several key lines of enquiry. These included: progress since the previous inspection, the reasons behind the trend of improvement in the early years and key stage 1, how well teaching in key stage 2 builds on the rising standards coming up from key stage 1, attendance rates, safeguarding and the quality of leadership and management.

By the end of the inspection, there were 16 recent responses on Parent View and 11 written comments. There were 10 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I took account of these responses and talked with some pupils and parents about how school staff listen to their views. I looked at a number of documents, including: pupils' progress information, the school's own evaluation of its performance, improvement plans, information about the work of the governing body, records of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning, and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe. I asked members of staff, pupils and parents about safeguarding matters.