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31 January 2017

Ruth Boon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Boon

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 17 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You took up the post of headteacher in January 2015. Since then, you have worked with great determination and effort to maintain the good quality of education in the school. Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced a significant level of staff turbulence and you, together with your assistant headteacher, have dealt with this admirably, keeping the needs of all pupils at the heart of your decisions.

You know the school well. You understand its strengths and are open and honest about what needs to be even better. In response to the previous inspection report, you have made several changes to the ways things are done at St Joseph's. You have identified and tackled weaker teaching and raised expectations about what constitutes effective practice. You have invested much time and effort into devising a programme of professional development for all staff, especially for those who are new to teaching. Now, staff morale is high and there is a buzz of enthusiasm and energy among the leaders, teachers and support staff. Leaders and staff share your vision to improve outcomes for all pupils further.

A strength of the school is the way in which you and the assistant headteacher lead by example. You model high-quality teaching and learning experiences for pupils and enable staff to share and reflect on their teaching strategies. There is a strong sense of support in the school, where staff routinely talk together about pupils' learning and progress.

Aspects of governance were also raised as an area to improve at the previous inspection. Governors know the school well and have an accurate understanding of

the school's assessment information. They compare the achievement of pupils at St Joseph's with that of other pupils nationally. I met with governors and scrutinised the minutes of their meetings and I can see that governors ask questions that challenge leaders to explain how well pupils are doing.

Both the early years leader and the English subject leader are new to post. You have clear plans in place to support these leaders in developing their roles. They have quickly got to grips with the key areas for further improvement in their areas of responsibility. However, as yet these actions have not had time to make an impact in raising pupils' achievement.

Parents are pleased with how well their children are cared for at St Joseph's. The responses to Parent View were positive and many of the comments from parents also commend the improvements that have been made to the school since your appointment two years ago. Parents speak highly of your commitment to their children's learning and well-being.

The school is a happy place to be. Staff and pupils are warm and welcoming and are clearly proud of their school. You have made many improvements to the school environment. Classrooms are bright and engaging places to learn.

Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. From the moment they arrive, pupils show extremely high levels of enthusiasm and engagement. They respond very well to the adults' kind and gentle approaches, show high levels of confidence and are keen to talk about what they are doing. Most importantly, pupils have good fun and respond well to their teachers and their friends. For example, children in the early years readily helped their friends fasten their coats and older pupils in Year 2 helped others read tricky words.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated safeguarding leader, you ensure that all the necessary safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that safeguarding records are detailed and of high quality. You have improved the procedures for reporting concerns and these are understood by staff. Together with the office manager, you ensure that all the necessary checks are made on the suitability of members of staff to work with children.

Safeguarding has a high profile in the school. You ensure that training is up to date so that staff and governors understand the current guidance. Referrals to the local authority, where necessary, are made promptly and followed up rigorously to make sure that children are kept safe from any potential dangers. The curriculum provides a range of opportunities for all pupils, including those in the early years, to learn how to keep themselves safe, including when they are using the internet. You work closely with external agencies to ensure that families are well supported. Recent training has enabled staff to be more aware of the school's context and their role in keeping children safe from extremist views.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry explored what leaders are doing to improve outcomes for the most able pupils, and girls, to ensure that a higher proportion achieve greater depth in reading and writing. The 2016 assessment information for Year 2 pupils showed that too few pupils, particularly the most able pupils, reached the higher standards.
- While you had hoped for better results in 2016, you acted quickly to find out the reasons for the decline. As a consequence, teachers are improving the level of challenge for all pupils, especially the most able.
- Work in pupils' books shows that standards are now high. The most able pupils receive work that is usually well matched to their abilities. The school's own assessment information shows that a higher number of pupils are attaining above age-related expectations throughout key stage 1. Inspection findings also confirm that girls achieve equally well compared to boys. Even so, inspection evidence confirms that more needs to be done. Newly appointed middle leaders need more time to develop their roles. They have recognised the priority to enable even more pupils to make swift progress and achieve the greater depth standards by the end of Year 2 in reading and writing.
- My second key line of enquiry related to the teaching of phonics. Over the last few years, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been below the national average. You have completely reviewed the way in which phonics is taught in the school. Last year, the proportion of pupils who achieved the standard rose significantly to almost the national average.
- You closely monitor the progress all pupils make in phonics. Teaching groups are flexible, which ensures that teaching builds on what pupils already know and can do and that no pupil is held back. The new programme of teaching phonics is well taught by staff. They can see the impact it is having on pupils' reading and writing. I listened to pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 read and they were using an impressive range of skills and strategies to help them read fluently. Children in the Nursery delighted in making 'fierce faces' as they used the 'f' sound to explore their story maps. Pupils in Year 2 tackled words such as 'tremendous' and 'anxiously' with confidence. Your high expectations are having a positive impact on the achievement of all pupils.
- Next, I focused on the early years. Up until 2015, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development was too low. This meant that children were not prepared well enough for their learning in Year 1. This is no longer the case. Much work has been done to improve the provision in the early years. In 2016, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development increased to well above the national average. Standards are high and work in children's learning journals and special books demonstrates that children make good progress from their starting points. The attractive learning environments, both inside and outdoors, are used well to promote reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- The quality of work in pupils' books is high and pupils make good progress in their writing. However, there are inconsistencies in the way in which handwriting is taught and presentation is modelled, reflecting inconsistencies in teaching. You have already started to address this and have recently implemented a new

handwriting programme throughout the school. Staff have received training and you plan to embed this over the coming year. Improving pupils' handwriting in all year groups will also enable a larger proportion to achieve the greater depth standards in writing.

- Finally, I checked the school's attendance information. This is because I was concerned about the number of pupils who were persistently absent last year and the low attendance rates of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have worked hard with families on this. Currently, pupils' attendance is better than the national average and the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved remarkably to well above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new leaders develop their roles fully so that they can further improve the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects or year groups, enabling a higher proportion of pupils to make rapid progress and attain the greater depth standards in reading and writing
- teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation and that the newly established handwriting approaches are firmly embedded.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Rawlings
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the school's safeguarding procedures
- leaders' actions to improve outcomes, particularly for the girls and the most able pupils, so that they reach the higher standards in reading and writing
- what leaders are doing to increase the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 1
- what leaders are doing to sustain the recently improved standards at the end of Reception
- what actions leaders have taken to improve attendance, particularly rates of persistent absence, and the impact of their actions.

The inspector carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection:

- meetings were held with senior leaders, a group of middle leaders and governors
- teaching was observed jointly across the school alongside the headteacher and assistant headteacher
- a discussion was held with a representative from the local authority over the telephone
- pupils from Reception, Year 1 and 2 were heard reading
- a range of school documents, including the safeguarding records and policies, governors' minutes, and a wide range of school policies, were scrutinised
- a range of pupils' books were reviewed during lessons
- the 12 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, were considered.