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Ms Alex Hanou
Headteacher
St John Roman Catholic Primary School
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Dear Ms Hanou

Short inspection of St John Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 March 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Although there has been turbulence in staffing and in some aspects of leadership in recent years, you have been resilient and steadfast in your management of this. You have also successfully taken the school through conversion to an academy. This has opened up further opportunities for the school to work with others, and access appropriate resources. Leadership capacity has been further strengthened with the recent appointment of your capable deputy headteacher, and the school is going from strength to strength. As a result, high expectations are being sustained and the focus on pupils' achievement remains your priority.

You and the deputy headteacher work effectively together and know the school well. You both have an accurate view of the strengths and areas that need further improvement. St John is an inclusive school. You focus on providing the best possible outcomes for all your pupils, no matter what their ability or background.

The previous inspection judged behaviour and safety as outstanding. It was the school's strength and this continues to be so. Pupils are well behaved, courteous and polite. They are proud to be part of St John RC Primary. They consider the school to be a happy place where everyone cares for one another.

Pupils value the opportunity to practise their Catholic faith; however, they talk equally positively about appreciating and respecting the faiths of others. When I met with pupils, they were keen to share information about their 'inter-faith' days. They believe that this experience helps them to learn about what others believe and celebrate their own beliefs. Pupils independently link this to their personal development. For example, a pupil said, 'being a Catholic is very important to me but I like to learn about what others believe too because this helps me to understand others, and be a better person when I am older.'

Pupils demonstrate good attitudes and a mature understanding towards their work. Pupils of all abilities are keen to challenge themselves to do well. They all spoke positively about actively using the 'fried egg' analogy in their learning. One pupil said, 'it helps you to keep aiming high, even if you get stuck.' Another pupil said, 'it's important once you have learned something to come out of your comfort zone to challenge yourself; it helps you improve.'

At the previous inspection, improving further the quality of teaching and learning so more was good and outstanding, was an identified area to develop. You are achieving this, while at the same time successfully managing the many changes to the teaching team. Teachers are being supported well by leaders to plan teaching that meets the needs of all pupils. Teachers newer to the profession receive guidance to plan learning. Training opportunities are developing teachers' practice quickly so that it is consistently effective. You recognise that there is still more work to be done to ensure that consistency across the school is more securely implemented.

Governors are proactive within the school. It is evident that they have the school's interests at heart. They spend time in school working with pupils, monitoring the school's work and focusing on their specific allocated roles. You ensure that governors are well informed about pupils' achievement and they provide appropriate challenge and support to leaders. However, there are some new governors, and others who do not always recognise the whole-school picture. They limit themselves to focusing on the areas they monitor. On occasions, this leads to some of them not being able to articulate strategically and clearly the aspects of the school's work with which they are unfamiliar.

Parents are very positive about the school. One parent summarised the views of many parents by saying: 'I can confidently say this is an amazing school. I have never experienced my children not wanting to go in to school. The staff go above and beyond what is expected. It is a caring, kind school that celebrates individuals, develops curiosity, and nurtures talents and interests. I have only had positive experiences and every member of the school community cares about the children.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your deputy headteacher and another senior member of staff have undertaken the appropriate training as designated safeguarding leaders. You take responsibility for, and oversee, the processes and systems for safeguarding very well. You work effectively with leaders and governors to make sure that safeguarding arrangements are effective, and all staff are committed to ensuring that pupils are well looked after. You have created a culture of awareness and vigilance to ensure the safety of pupils within the school. The current systems in place are strengthened through annual external verification by the local authority.

All of your policies relating to safeguarding are up to date. Staff updates, alongside regular training, ensure that staff remain well informed in their knowledge of how to keep pupils safe. This includes training in the 'Prevent' duty to keep pupils safe from radicalisation. The appointment of all new staff follows appropriate safeguarding procedures. As a result, effective training and safer recruitment are firmly in place and all staff have undergone thorough checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

Staff are aware of what to do if they need to raise any concerns. Inspection evidence shows that though there are few cases, the records you keep are detailed and thorough. This ensures that all chronological information about individual pupils contributes towards a bigger picture that helps leaders take decisive action to keep pupils safe. There are effective links with parents and outside agencies as necessary so that pupils receive timely and appropriate support when required.

Pupils say that they feel very safe and explain that they can approach any adult in the school if they have a worry or concern. Pupils respect the school rules and explain that, 'rules are to keep us safe'. Pupils demonstrate an impressive knowledge of keeping safe when using information technology. Pupils say that they have a good understanding because the school has 'safer internet' days, and pupils understand how the school is looking after them. For example, younger pupils were able to explain that if a 'dolphin' appears on the screen, it means that you need to speak to a teacher because there may be a problem.

All parents who responded to the online inspection questionnaire reported that their children felt safe at school and were well looked after and cared for at St John RC Primary School. As one parent confirmed, 'The school provides a safe, welcoming and supportive environment for children to learn academically and grow personally.'

Inspection findings

- One of the inspection focuses was exploring how you are ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is improving so that pupils' achievement rises. You, and your new deputy headteacher, are both relentless in your approach to improving teaching. Your regular monitoring celebrates strengths and identifies areas to develop quickly, linked to pupils' progress in lessons. This supports teachers to be able to meet the needs of the pupils in their class. It helps them to work quickly on aspects that will make a difference to how well pupils do in their classes.
- As a result, pupils' books and current assessment information show that pupils are making at least expected progress, and on many occasions, good progress from their varying starting points. You rightly identify a few areas of inconsistency, but are already honing in on these to remedy them quickly.
- Another line of enquiry for this inspection was to assess how well mathematics provision across the school, particularly in key stage 1 and for girls, was improving. In 2016, the proportion of key stage 1 pupils who reached the expected standard was below national average. Girls' attainment in mathematics was well below that of the boys. I explored what you, the mathematics leader and your teachers were doing to improve this. I also checked to see whether current pupils, especially the girls and pupils in key stage 1, are making better progress so their attainment rises.
- Leaders are already having an impact in addressing this issue. For example, a calculation policy has been devised and applied to teaching and learning. This is successfully ensuring that teachers are using appropriately progressive written methods for calculating. Currently, pupils are covering a lot of ground at the right level of depth and making better progress. There is evidence that pupils are being encouraged to reason, problem solve and to explain their thinking. I spoke to a group of girls about their mathematics work. Their response was very positive. They all thought that they were making good progress. Current progress evidence shows that the difference between girls' and boys' attainment is diminishing in mathematics.
- An additional line of enquiry on this inspection was to look in detail at pupils' achievement in writing. In the 2016 outcomes, pupils achieved well in writing in key stage 1. The proportion of pupils achieving both at expected, and at greater depth was above the national average. However, there was a more mixed picture for key stage 2 pupils. While most-able writers did well, lower- and middle attainers did not do as well.

- You have been focusing on improving pupils' writing. Pupils have more opportunities to write so they can practise their application of spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. There is also evidence of pupils being given the chance to use their writing skills in other subject areas. For example, in Year 5 science, pupils wrote an explanation about night and day. In religious education, pupils wrote a comparative piece of writing summarising the significance of Jesus' teaching. The writing was of a high quality and demonstrated that pupils had thought about the audience and the purpose of their writing. As a result, pupils' progress in writing is quickening and the majority of pupils are set to achieve their aspirational targets.
- Although the school has only a small number of disadvantaged pupils, a line of enquiry was to check the effectiveness of the use of the additional funding the school receives for these pupils. In 2016, the number of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected, and higher national standard was below the national average. Currently, the provision for disadvantaged pupils is individualised to meet their varying needs, both academically and very often socially and emotionally. Teachers are more aware of disadvantaged pupils' needs in their class through their detailed provision plans. This ensures that appropriate support is planned, reviewed and adapted to reflect their evolving needs. The latest school information shows that the few disadvantaged pupils are making at least expected progress in writing.
- Last year, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, was lower than the national average. However, this rate of absence was the result of genuine absences. You keep a very close eye on the attendance of all your pupils to ensure that pupils are happy and attending regularly. Consequently, the school's overall attendance is consistently in line with, or above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all governors continue to receive training and work closely together to help them to extend further their strategic whole-school understanding
- their focused work is continued to embed consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the whole school so that standards continue to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher. We talked about the improvements made since the previous inspection and I considered your self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I scrutinised a range of documents, including your monitoring of teaching and learning and minutes of governing body meetings. I looked at all safeguarding records and checked your recruitment procedures. I also held discussions with two governors and a representative from the local authority. Together we visited all classes, talked to pupils, and looked at their work in mathematics and English and their curriculum books. I had a discussion with a group of pupils and heard some pupils read. I took into account the 47 survey results from 'Parent View', and considered the 45 comments that had been submitted through the free-text service. I also considered the school's pupil surveys and pupil voice evaluations.