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27 March 2017

Mr Frank Toner
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Dear Mr Toner

Short inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School, Trowbridge

Following my visit to the school on 7 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have a clear vision for the school. You have built a strong team of leaders around you who work together effectively to ensure that any aspects identified for improvement are embedded quickly into the daily workings of school life. You actively encourage staff to share their expertise across the school and to reflect on their own practice. This supports a whole-school culture of continuous improvement. As a result, teaching is good. Pupils make good and sometimes rapid progress at the school.

Pupils' behaviour is often exceptional. They demonstrate a striking maturity and drive to learn as much as possible.

At your last inspection, you were asked to make sure that pupils in key stage 1 take more opportunities to work independently and take responsibility for their learning. Your work in this regard is highly effective. Pupils take their learning seriously and often show deep levels of concentration and enthusiasm. In key stage 2, pupils are consistent in demonstrating exemplary attitudes to learning. They expect to be challenged and they enjoy every minute.

The additional experiences you provide to extend pupils' contributions to school life beyond the classroom are impressive. For example, pupils act as subject leaders and take a leading role in planning, reviewing and evaluating the curriculum subjects on offer. Pupils talk passionately about their roles. For example, 'writing warriors' and 'digital leaders' say that their work ensures that the curriculum is more exciting. They say that these important roles in the school also develop their leadership skills and this prepares them well for secondary school.

At the last inspection, you were also asked to improve pupils' achievement in writing. Pupils' achievement in writing at the end of key stages 1 and 2 is improving steadily and has been in line with or above the national average for a few years now. However, fewer pupils than hoped for achieve the highest standards in writing. Current work to accelerate the most able pupils' achievement is beginning to bear fruit, with more pupils meeting or exceeding the expected standards in writing this year. Nevertheless, you are not complacent and recognise that there is even more to be done to accelerate progress even further for middle- and high-attaining pupils in key stage 2.

Another aspect for development was to ensure that pupils are set work at the right level for all pupils. Teaching usually builds on what pupils can do already. The school's approach to planning work with graduated levels of challenge is helping to encourage more middle-attaining pupils to achieve higher levels of achievement. This approach is increasingly successful in mathematics.

The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school. Almost all respondents to the Parent View questionnaire said that they would recommend it. A typical comment was 'the school's strengths lie in you knowing, and caring for, each pupil as an individual'.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. Leaders with specific responsibilities for safeguarding are diligent in carrying out their duties. Concerns are followed up quickly and records meticulously kept. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure that children get the support they need.

There is a comprehensive programme of staff training which ensures that staff and governors have knowledge and understanding which is up to date with current guidelines and legislation. For many, training is at a skill level above that which is required for their role. As a result, staff, governors and volunteers have an advanced awareness of the risks that children may face. Staff are acutely aware of how to refer concerns and of following up referrals so that they can be sure everything is being done to reduce risks.

There are clear signing-in procedures for visitors, and a meticulous approach to ensure everyone who visits understands the school's high expectations of safeguarding throughout the organisation. Governors carry out frequent visits to check the impact of the school's procedures to keep children safe. Consequently,

systems are tight, including those for reporting children missing from education.

Pupils say they feel safe. They told me that if they have a concern, they can talk to any adult in the school and have confidence that it would be sorted immediately.

Inspection findings

To ascertain that the school remained good, a key line of enquiry focused on how leaders and teachers are using their assessments to build on what pupils already know so that pupils make good progress in writing from their different starting points.

- Although the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard was above the national average in 2016, the proportion of pupils who achieved the highest standard was lower. Current pupils in the school are making good progress in writing. The school's recent focus on raising levels of challenge for the most able pupils is enabling more pupils to achieve well and exceed nationally expected standards.
- Occasionally, weak spelling is hindering pupils' progress in Years 3 and 4. There are too few opportunities for writing at length across the curriculum, and this slows the progress that pupils make. As a result, pupils with middle prior attainment could do even better. While this group make good progress overall, more pupils could make rapid and sustained progress so that they exceed the standards expected nationally.

My second line of enquiry was about how well leaders are driving improvement at the school to ensure that pupils' achievement is good and pupils attend well, including those who are disadvantaged.

- Subject leaders provide training and support for teachers and this ensures that teachers' subject knowledge is good. A shared approach to observing teaching supports leaders' accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. However, leaders do not check on pupils' progress regularly enough or track the progress of specific groups of pupils sufficiently.
- Leaders track pupils' attendance across the school. However, too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Too many pupils take extended holidays. Consequently, persistent absence is not reducing quickly enough, particularly for pupils who speak English as an additional language or those who are disadvantaged. Leaders could do more to tackle this aspect.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is managed increasingly well. Leaders have ensured that additional support is in place to develop pupils' academic and emotional development. Its impact is analysed effectively by governors. Consequently, current pupils are making good progress overall.

Another aspect I looked at was the impact of teaching on raising rates of challenge in mathematics in upper key stage 2. This is because the proportion of pupils exceeding national expectations dipped in 2016.

- The teaching of mathematics is good. The school's current work to increase challenge in the curriculum is proving effective. Pupils are making good progress in mathematics and show good fluency in arithmetic. In some classes, pupils are making rapid progress because they are encouraged to think deeply and apply their mathematical knowledge to a wide range of contexts. Pupils are expected to justify whether answers are correct and talk about their mathematical understanding. Consequently, pupils' reasoning skills continue to develop well. Rightly, this remains a key focus so that it becomes an embedded feature in every year group.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle and senior leaders make regular checks on pupils' progress so that they have a full and accurate understanding of the progress of specific groups of pupils
- teachers' expectations are consistently high so that a larger proportion of middle-attaining pupils make rapid and sustained progress and reach the highest academic standards in writing and mathematics
- rates of attendance improve swiftly for groups of pupils, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you, staff, pupils and a group of governors. I also had a telephone discussion with representatives from the local authority and diocese of Clifton. I made visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning and to scrutinise their work. I talked with pupils to gather their views of the school.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, development plans, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 34 responses to the Parent View online survey, 26 responses to the staff survey and 43 responses to the pupil survey.