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Mrs Philippa Agate
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Dear Mrs Agate

Short inspection of St Cecilia's Catholic Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is because, under your expert guidance and leadership, you have made certain the whole-school community works together to tackle the weaknesses you accurately identify. Appointed only weeks before the last inspection, you used the areas for improvement identified in that report as an agenda to improve standards in the school. You have succeeded in this aim because pupils made strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016, maintaining the strengths seen in 2015.

You and your staff have created a happy and harmonious school community. Pupils love this school because they say that teachers are friendly and 'want to help you to do your best' and pupils are 'nice to each other'. Parents too share this view. As one parent told me, the school is 'like an extended family' and 'teachers make sure your child is well looked after in school'.

You have successfully tackled most of the areas for improvement from the last inspection, but know there is still more that can be done. You improved teachers' planning by making sure assessment information is used to plan work for pupils which is of a more appropriate level of difficulty. You have also supported teachers in developing their questioning skills so that pupils routinely expand their responses and demonstrate good reasoning skills. You have been successful in creating a culture of sharing effective teaching practice across the school. Teachers readily

take on new challenges and try out new strategies to help pupils to learn well. This is supported by subject leaders who regularly present ideas to teachers in 'curriculum breakfasts'.

Your work with middle and other leaders to ensure good capacity to sustain improvement through, for example, involving them in checking on the quality of teaching and learning has been hampered by staff changes and some restructuring of responsibilities, including a new chair of the governing body appointed two weeks before this inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. The rigour of your checks carried out on all staff, teaching and non-teaching, before they start work in the school ensures that staff appointed are of the highest quality and understand the school's commitment to keeping pupils safe. Staff sign a form to confirm that they have read and understand all current policies in school, and records are maintained of all training attended by staff. Staff understand the correct procedures to follow if they have a concern about a pupil because they have all taken part in good-quality training on a range of themes, including safeguarding, preventing extremist and radical views, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe because your personal, social and health education programme, combined with talks from outside agencies, teaches them how to stay safe. This includes themes such as road safety, preventing cyber bullying, addictions, feelings and loving relationships. Pupils say that there are no bullies in school and any 'falling-outs' are due to friendship issues. They are confident that, when this happens, teachers do a good job of mediating to encourage everyone to be friends again.

Inspection findings

- Shortly after your appointment, you set about implementing a series of structural improvements to improve the pupils' learning environment. You have improved the space for the school library, provided somewhere for pupils to eat lunch on-site and created areas for small-group work, nurture activities and music lessons. Pupils greatly appreciate the improvements you have made to the playground which, they say, mean they can now play outside sports and team games, such as dodgeball.
- A key line of enquiry for this inspection was to find out about middle leaders' work in improving teaching, learning and assessment in their subject areas. Subject leaders for information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education, appointed in September, are recently qualified teachers and at the early stages of developing their leadership skills. Other leaders have only recently taken over responsibility to lead their area, including the leaders for physical education and science and the curriculum coordinator. Nevertheless, your subject leaders demonstrate passion for their subject and a commitment to

your vision for school improvement. They have improved curriculum plans and teaching resources in their subject areas, so that learning is fun and activities engage pupils' interest. As a result, pupils experience a rich and broad curriculum, whose areas includes spiritual, scientific, language, artistic and ICT.

- A further line of enquiry was to find out about the progress pupils make in other subjects, as well as in English and mathematics. Teachers carefully check if pupils are 'on track' and additional help is provided for pupils who are 'working towards' their expectations for their age. Subject leaders are at the early stages of developing a robust approach to assessment. In some subjects, such as ICT, subject leaders are trialling systems to track progress. Most subject leaders are not yet able to identify differences in progress for particular groups, such as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able disadvantaged pupils, to know if strategies to remove barriers to their learning are effective.
- During this inspection, I wanted to find out more about how the most able pupils in the school were challenged in their reading and mathematics. This was because some most-able pupils made less progress in these subjects than in writing in Year 6 in 2016. You accurately identify the strengths of teaching and quickly spot where improvements can be made to improve progress. Some most-able pupils are capable of making even better progress, particularly in mathematics, because the work they are given is not hard enough for them. Work seen in books is overly repetitive, instead of supporting fluency or deepening pupils' understanding.
- Pupils enjoy reading, which they do fluently and with confidence, although not always with understanding and expression. Pupils, including the most able, have suitably challenging books which extend their vocabulary. This is because teachers guide pupils to books of the right level and, where books are brought in from home, teachers check if they are suitable. Weaker readers enjoy reading to an adult in school every day, which they say is helping them to improve quickly.
- Another key line of enquiry was to find out about the impact of your work to raise attainment in grammar, punctuation and spelling, especially for disadvantaged pupils. This was because, last year, attainment in grammar, punctuation and spelling was only average, and disadvantaged pupils' attainment was below their more advantaged classmates' attainment and below that of other pupils nationally. Quite rightly, you have given a high priority to raising attainment in grammar, punctuation and spelling, especially for disadvantaged pupils, to make sure that it is as good as pupils' achievement in writing. You are tackling this through a range of strategies, including regular teaching of spelling rules, setting homework which targets pupils' weaknesses in grammar and a consistent approach to marking and correcting pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling errors across all subjects. Pupils say that these strategies are already making a difference and they can see improvements for themselves in their work.
- You have high expectations for good attendance and carefully monitor any pupils whose attendance falls below 95%. You have introduced incentives and rewards to encourage good attendance, but these are making little difference for a few disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or

disabilities. Overall attendance has fallen slightly over the last three years but continues to be broadly average.

- Governors know the school well because they are actively involved in gathering evidence to find out about the impact of leaders' work, through taking part in short visits to lessons and checks on pupils' work in books. Subject leaders regularly present their work to the governors in meetings, providing the governing body with the opportunity to ask challenging questions of leaders about their work. Governors are knowledgeable and keep their own training up to date to make sure that they have the skills required to hold leaders to account.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders further refine and improve monitoring in their area so that they know about pupils' progress, including that of the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- teachers plan work in mathematics which is appropriately challenging for all pupils, including the most able, deepening their understanding as a result.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, a range of activities were carried out. For example, I checked your safeguarding, progress and attendance information. I met with you and other leaders, a group of governors and your school improvement partner. I scrutinised your own analysis from your recent parents' surveys and your own survey on the views of staff. I spoke with parents as they collected pupils at the end of the day and considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I talked with pupils during the day, listened to them read and saw them at work. When you joined me in visits to lessons, we also looked at pupils' work in their books.