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28 March 2017

Jane Smedley
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Dear Mrs Smedley

Short inspection of St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, A Voluntary Academy

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 predecessor school was judged to be good in May 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 lead with quiet, humble determination. You want nothing but the best for the pupils in your care, but are careful to ensure that the staff understand and support your priorities. They are happy, motivated and fully committed to the school's mission.

The values that inform your work are deeply engrained in the life of the school. This was most evident in the assembly I visited, where the older pupils gave a presentation about the charities they had chosen to support, having debated the pros and cons of each charity in class. Their strong sense of social justice was evident in the reasons they gave for supporting their chosen causes. As they explained, 'It's every child's right to have clean water,' and 'Every child should feel safe and know who to turn to.' You have done much to ensure that you and your staff listen to pupils' views, and that pupils make a valuable contribution to the life of the school. Pupils I spoke with were proud to tell me of improvements made to the playground, based on their recommendations.

You have established a calm, inclusive and purposeful ethos. The school day gets off to a brisk start as parents drop off their children to take part in extra sessions. The early morning is a hive of activity, as pupils catch up on work missed, go over their work or receive additional support. The pupils in Year 6 I spoke with told me how much they appreciate the personalised booster sessions in preparation for their

end-of-key-stage tests.

Parents are highly supportive of the school. One described it as a 'school that cares for the whole child, through its ethos and mission statement'. Many refer to its family feel and are proud of its place in the community. One parent of a child who has special educational needs told me, 'They couldn't do any more.'

You lead a successful school, but are ambitious for its further success. You, other senior leaders and middle leaders have put in place detailed action plans for different areas of the school's work. The governing body carefully monitors progress against these plans. For example, pupils' attainment was above national averages at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 but you recognised that, for some pupils, and particularly in reading, this did not represent outstanding progress from their starting points. You put in place swift action to tackle the issues you identified. The new reading policy, based on evidenced-based research, is proving successful. Teachers have adapted teaching resources and methods so that they are both more engaging and more challenging for the most able pupils, and boys in particular. The 'Red Ted' scheme (read every day, talk every day) is encouraging pupils to read more often. The younger pupils enjoy the competitive element that this brings.

Your approach is based on creating a love of reading, rather than just reading competency, and it is paying dividends. There is a real buzz about reading around the school. The pupils in Years 2 and 6 who read to me enjoyed talking about the books they liked most, and were enthusiastic readers. For the most part, they did so with confidence and fluency. Current information suggests that a much higher proportion of the most able pupils in Year 6 are now on track to achieve the higher standard in reading by the end of this academic year, with no major differences in achievement between boys and girls.

You have taken equally determined action in response to pupils' relatively lower attainment in spelling, punctuation and grammar at the end of key stage 1 in 2016. Informative classroom displays and a new approach to teaching these skills has led to improvement here, too. Teachers are skilled in encouraging pupils to be resilient and check for themselves when they are uncertain, for example of how to spell a word. They are well supported by skilled and effective teaching assistants, who make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Both in reading and in spelling, grammar and punctuation, improvements are recent and have not yet had time to generate the standards predicted for the end of each key stage.

In the early years, the high proportion of pupils overall who achieved a good level of development in 2016 masked the fact that boys did not achieve as well as girls, particularly in writing. Many of these boys had lower starting points than the girls, but you rightly recognise that they did not make enough progress. You have a much higher proportion of boys in the current year group, and have taken action to ensure that they get off to a rapid start in their learning and development. You have developed the outdoor area, so that it is better suited to promoting learning as well as play. Boys now have more opportunities to develop the gross and fine motor skills they need to start to form letters and develop their writing skills. The

experienced leader has reviewed the provision, so that there is a better balance between child-led and structured learning, and this new approach is working well. When we visited the early years, the children were really keen to show us the 'underwater maze' they had constructed, replete with booby traps. Children were excitedly working together to find a safe passage for the fish.

Your school is part of The Aquinas Catholic Academy Trust, a small multi-academy trust. The trust has identified a set of priorities that inform its work and you work effectively with them to bring about improvement. You ensure that your school's staff have opportunities to learn from and share best practice with colleagues from partner schools. These links are also used to improve your school's provision, as teachers from the secondary school teach music and French to your pupils. The parents I spoke with knew about the opportunities their children had to learn these subjects and to take part in activities with other schools, but were less clear about how your links with other schools were promoting school improvement.

You work with partner headteachers to ensure that there is sound succession planning in place, by identifying and nurturing potentially talented leaders. Consequently, some of your staff and leaders have been promoted within trust schools. A few of your middle leaders are relatively new in post. They are skilled practitioners who support other staff well to develop teaching, learning and assessment. They are less involved in rigorously monitoring the work of others and holding them to account for improvement. You recognise this missing element in their leadership skills and its impact on the overall quality of leadership in the school.

The governing body has a good understanding of its responsibilities as distinct from those of the trust board. Like you, governors are deeply committed to the work and life of this school. One governor dropped into school on his way to work to tell me why he found his role as a governor so rewarding, saying, 'This school gave me a warm welcome to this country, so I am keen to give something back.' The governing body works with you to set the strategic direction for the school and carefully checks progress against the whole-school development plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the staff team work closely together to ensure that your systems to keep pupils safe are secure. All the staff I spoke with, including midday supervisors and a visiting sports coach, knew what to do if they had concerns about a pupil. Your teachers understand their role in ensuring that pupils and their families receive help early on, before problems escalate. You and the lead person for safeguarding keep a close eye on any pupils about whom you have concerns, ensuring that you keep each other updated regularly. Should it be needed, a member of staff is available to help parents who speak English as an additional language, so that they fully understand the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. Safeguarding is top of the agenda for every school meeting, and for those with your partner schools.

Inspection findings

- Actions to improve enjoyment and success in reading are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement. Leaders are confident that a much higher proportion of pupils will achieve the higher standard in reading at the end of this academic year.
- The difference between girls' and boys' attainment at the end of key stage 2 is diminishing. An equally high proportion of boys and girls are on track to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics this year. While more girls than boys will achieve the higher standards in all subjects, leaders are confident that this will represent good progress both for boys and for girls.
- Improved teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar is improving pupils' skills in these areas. A higher proportion of pupils in both key stages 1 and 2 are on track to achieve the expected and higher standards this year.
- In the early years, more boys than in 2016 are on track to achieve well in writing, and achieve a good level of development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers in all classes sustain the recent improvements in the teaching of reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation consistently, so that all pupils, including the most able and boys, make good progress throughout the school and achieve the highest standards of which they are capable
- middle leaders provide greater challenge, as well as support, to the teams they lead when they hold staff to account for pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you to discuss and agree the areas of focus, and with other senior leaders and middle leaders. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. I listened to two groups of pupils reading, from a wide ability range, and spoke with pupils about their learning. Together we made brief visits to all classes, and undertook observations in learning in a selection of classes. We looked at the work in pupils' books, and at their reading records. I met with the chair of the governing body, and a representative from The Aquinas Catholic Academy Trust. I spoke informally with another governor, and with the parish priest, who is also a governor. I observed an assembly and made a brief visit to the after-school drama club. I considered a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, current information about pupils' attainment and progress, and records of behaviour and safeguarding, including the single central record. There were no responses to the staff or pupil surveys, but I took account of the 27 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.