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Mrs Christine Fenna
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Dear Mrs Fenna

Short inspection of St Paul's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 April 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, the staff and the governing body strive continually to provide a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment for your pupils, some of whom come from vulnerable families. You evaluate the work of the school effectively and use your conclusions to identify priorities for improvement and consequent action which you rigorously implement. The drop in achievement in 2016 of the pupils at the end of Years 2 and 6 is untypical. Published data does not reflect fully the true quality of the school's work. As cohort numbers are very small and pupil mobility is very high, outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 6 can vary widely. For example, pupils' progress over their time at key stage 2 was above average at the end of 2015, but below average at the end of 2016.

You have tackled well the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Teaching is now consistent and your new marking policy ensures that pupils in all classes know how well they have done and how to improve their work. The parents I spoke to expressed very positive views about the school. They find staff approachable and appreciate the way in which you greet pupils every morning at the gate. This means that parents can immediately air any concerns. This was summed up for me by one parent, who wrote, 'The school is very proactive when dealing with parents' concerns.'

Teaching is good across the school. Parents told me how well teachers provide for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is borne out by the good progress that these pupils make. Pupils supported by pupil premium funding generally make the same progress as other pupils from their starting points.

Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning. Their social and academic progress is fostered well. Your pupils learn how to take on responsibility, such as serving on the school or Eco councils, and told me that they felt they understood British values well. Your 'bully buster' campaign is effective. The pupils I met were confident that bullying was not a problem in school and that if it occurred then it was dealt with well by the staff. As a result, your pupils feel safe and well looked after.

I was especially impressed by the new provision that you created for two-year-old children from September 2014. These children work with adults in their own separate room and have their own outdoor garden and learning area. The garden area is very attractive, with 'smelly wellies' (the smell is from the herb rosemary) and apple trees, and on the day of my visit children were planting tomatoes. You provide a very secure environment which has been resourced with small children in mind. All the welfare requirements are met effectively and your scrapbook of activities illustrates well how quickly the children have settled and how soon they make progress. Learning activities, such as teddy bears' picnics, celebrating world book day, learning nursery rhymes (including parents), exploring ice in winter and baking gingerbread men, have resulted in all of the children in the setting making better than expected progress towards the early learning goals. A particularly effective activity was that in which children picked the apples from their own garden, made apple crumble and enjoyed it as part of their lunch. They also regularly bake banana bread for homeless people in the area. Expert questioning by adults accelerates their learning very effectively. For example, children could say how many apples they used and what the ingredients were.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors share a commitment to keeping pupils safe. Your arrangements for safeguarding are meticulous and highly effective. You work successfully with other agencies to minimise the possibility of harm to any pupil. Staff told me that they receive regular and high-quality safeguarding training to keep them well informed and up to date. They felt that they knew how to act in a range of different circumstances. The staff told me that they do not consider what may appear to be small concerns to be unimportant and so are always prepared to raise a concern quickly. You carefully evaluate the risks involved when pupils take part in different activities. You are assiduous in ensuring that staff recruitment is conducted safely.

Pupils were confident in saying that they are well looked after and can share any worries they might have with an adult. They described their school as a happy and safe place. They like the pastoral care group sessions in which pupils from all classes work together in groups to earn 'golden tickets'. You have set up key worker groups so that all pupils have a safe 'listening adult' who can provide emotional and

academic support when necessary. Pupils told me confidently that they understood how to keep themselves safe in different situations. I was impressed by their awareness of the dangers to avoid when using the internet and social media.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of good quality. Weekly safeguarding meetings ensure that staff are constantly vigilant and alert to any concerns. You were able to show me the records of pupils who had benefited substantially from support provided by the school in different circumstances.

Inspection findings

- You have identified that boys are achieving less well than girls in some classes and have promptly adopted new strategies to help boys to make stronger progress. These include making sure that there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to investigate topics using modern technology and ensuring that boys are given research topics that appeal to them. Boys and girls alike enjoy using the hand-held 'Paul pods' to instantly record their answers. Younger boys especially enjoy the mathematics challenge of the day which often takes place outdoors. Currently, you are using the building site next door to the school as a learning experience. Some houses are being erected and teachers are using this as a source of interesting mathematical problem-solving questions.
- In the early years and key stage 1 classes you ensure that there are plenty of building and water experiments and there is a good focus on investigation in science topics. Your staff are choosing reading texts which especially appeal to boys. It is pleasing that currently 50% of the pupils who enjoy coming to 'Tales at Teatime' in the library are boys. The success of your strategies is reflected in the fact that this year all the middle-ability boys in key stage 2 are on track to achieve the standards expected for their ages.
- You are working hard to build on the good progress your younger children make in phonics so that they become fluent and competent readers. This is not always reflected in published data because the children who have achieved well in phonics at the end of Year 1 sometimes leave and those who come in Year 2 have not always had the benefit of the same good grounding. The younger pupils who read to me were well taught to use decoding skills to pronounce new and difficult words. Older pupils explained to me that they knew how important it is to learn to read well but that it is also a great pleasure.
- Your newly refurbished library is a most attractive space, with many enticing books and quiet reading corners as well as lovely murals and twinkling fairy lights. A good number of pupils enjoy hearing adults read there after school in 'Tales at Teatime' sessions.
- You and your staff recognise that standards in mathematics are not as good as they could be, and particularly for middle-ability pupils. Your staff have worked with consultants to improve their awareness of the rigours of the new mathematics curriculum. You are part of a local cluster of schools that share good practice and moderate each other's work to make sure that assessments are accurate.

- Pupils are taught in mixed-ability sets and teachers ensure that the level of challenge is high for everyone. You have put a much stronger focus on mathematical reasoning and give pupils many opportunities to explain their learning. I saw this in several of the classes we visited, where it was not enough for pupils to reach the right answers. They had to prove that the answer was right by using different methods. Your teachers are very good at helping pupils to visualise the calculations and problems by using resources such as counters and bricks and illustrating answers with images. You reinforce understanding by giving pupils many opportunities to apply what they have learned in different ways and by linking learning to real-life situations. The success of your strategies is seen in the tracking data for this academic year, which shows that 100% of middle-ability pupils are on track to achieve the standards expected for their age in Years 4 and 5, 75% in Year 3 and 50% in Year 6.
- Parents told me that they need help in understanding the work that their children do and how much they have appreciated the workshop sessions you provided for them so that they are better able to help their children.
- You are well aware that one of the key barriers to learning for your pupils is low attendance. Although the overall annual attendance figure is broadly in line with the national average and shows small improvements each year, the number of pupils who are persistently absent is higher than average. You work closely with the local authority education and welfare officer and, as a result, the number of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing, especially for specific groups such as disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your decision to open the school to pupils a little earlier and to allow them to come in as soon as they arrive is proving effective in improving attendance as well as supporting a lively breakfast club. You take a firm line with parents and never authorise holidays in term time. Pupils told me that they like the various rewards they gain for good attendance each week.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers systematically build the confidence of all pupils in tackling challenging work in mathematics so that outcomes improve further
- persistent absence is tackled effectively so that more pupils attend school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Judith Straw
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During my visit I met with you and your deputy headteacher and four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to a member of the local authority school improvement team. I met with a group of parents and looked at the survey results from the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed the staff comments on the Ofsted questionnaire as well as speaking to many members of staff. Together, you and I visited mathematics sessions in key stage 2 and looked closely at pupils' workbooks in mathematics across the school. I met with a group of Year 6 pupils to hear their views and considered the pupils' responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire. I listened to six pupils of different ages and abilities reading and talked to them about their progress. I reviewed your current assessment system and data which tracks pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. I especially looked at the progress of boys overall and middle-ability pupils in mathematics. I evaluated the accuracy of your self-evaluation and school development priorities. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements and your work to ensure the regular attendance of your pupils.