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Mr Danny MacAreavy
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Dear Mr MacAreavy

Short inspection of St John Bosco Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 April 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education at St John Bosco since the last inspection, and has ensured that the school continues to improve. The school's mission statement says that the school aims to 'prepare children to live and thrive in the real world'. The school succeeds in achieving this goal, as pupils are encouraged to develop a wide range of academic, sporting, social and creative skills that prepare them very well for secondary school and beyond. The impact of this work is recognised and appreciated by the parents, and almost all who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to other parents.

Pupils are extremely polite and well-mannered. The 'exemplary' standard of behaviour that was noted in the previous inspection has been maintained. Pupils are articulate and able to express their views and opinions clearly, but also listen well and respect other people's ideas. Their attitudes to learning are highly positive, as can be seen in their diligence in class and the high quality of presentation of work in books and on displays. Staff and pupils get on well together and one pupil summed up the views of many in saying that St John Bosco is 'a really happy place to come and learn'. Pupils enjoy having the opportunity to take on positions of responsibility, and elections for school council roles help to develop their understanding of democracy. School councillors were particularly proud of the fundraising work that they have helped to organise for charities at home and abroad, which has included cake sales and a sponsored 'mannequin challenge'.

The school provides pupils with a broad and well-balanced curriculum. Educational visits to places such as Catalyst Science Museum, the Beatles Experience and Croxteth Hall enhance pupils' learning and bring topics to life. The curriculum is further enriched by well-planned focus weeks that provide pupils with the chance for in-depth study of diverse areas such as science and world religions. The school has a strong sporting tradition and a highly impressive collection of trophies won in local and national competitions. However, participation is not limited to those most able at sport. All pupils are encouraged to take part in sporting activities through after-school clubs and during breaktimes, where a wide range of sport and games equipment is available. The varied programme of extra-curricular activities also includes many non-sporting activities such as cookery and singing.

You have addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress from early years to Year 6 have been completely overhauled so that teachers now are able to identify quickly any pupils who are at risk of underachievement. Additional support is put in place to help pupils who need to catch up, and this is having a positive impact on the progress that they make. Pupils also told me that they are now regularly given time to check teachers' written feedback and make improvements to their work.

There is no sense of complacency though, and you and other leaders recognise that there is still work to be done, particularly in terms of further improving pupils' achievement in writing. Over time, pupils' progress in writing by the end of Year 6 has lagged behind their typically strong progress in reading and mathematics. This was again the case in 2016, where progress in reading and mathematics was significantly above the national average, but where progress in writing was broadly in line with other schools nationally. Leaders have conducted a detailed analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses in writing and have used this as the basis of their improvement plan. Inspection evidence shows that actions taken are having a positive impact, although there is scope for further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. The school site is well maintained and secure. Staff and governors receive regular training so that their knowledge of good practice in safeguarding is kept up to date. They have a clear understanding of what to do if they are worried about a pupil's well-being, and leaders ensure that any concerns are swiftly followed up. Leaders also ensure that appropriate checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and trust their teachers to look after them well. They have a good understanding of what bullying is, but are confident that bullying is extremely rare in their school. Pupils also understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, such as when using the internet, and a number of pupils have designed their own posters to promote e-safety and to warn younger pupils of the dangers of cyber bullying. This is typical of the school's

proactive approach to promoting high standards of behaviour and safety.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to look at the quality of teaching, learning and leadership in early years. It is clear that, since the last inspection, there have been significant improvements in the effectiveness of early years provision at St John Bosco. Children in Reception class now get off to a really good start. They arrive with skills and understanding that are broadly typical for their age and make good progress so that an above-average number leave Reception class having achieved a good level of development. Staff have high expectations and challenge the most able children so that they make particularly strong progress. Teaching is engaging and activities are well planned so that they capture children's imagination and meet their individual learning needs. During the inspection, children were highly motivated by the theme of 'pirates' and enjoyed activities that included writing about pirates and balancing while trying to 'walk the plank'. Staff make and record observations that help them to track children's progress accurately and plan the next steps in their learning.
- The second of my key lines of enquiry was to look at the effectiveness of the teaching of writing across the school. This was an area that school leaders had also identified as a priority and were already looking to improve. Evidence in pupils' books, and in displays of writing around the school, showed that their efforts are having a positive impact. An increasing proportion of pupils are working at the expected level for their age in writing. Where writing is improving most quickly, pupils are challenged to use adventurous vocabulary and to try writing in different styles and genres, such as letters, play scripts and character descriptions. Teachers have good subject knowledge and teach pupils appropriate writing skills for their year group. However, the most able pupils are not consistently given the opportunity to apply these skills quickly enough in their own writing. Some good examples of writing in other subjects were seen, such as accounts of the Blitz written by Year 6, but teachers do not consistently make the most of opportunities to develop pupils' writing in this way.
- Finally, I looked at how well the most able pupils are being challenged so that they reach the high standards of which they are capable. In mathematics, the most able pupils are challenged to use their skills and knowledge to solve written problems, and to then explain their reasoning. This approach is helping to ensure that pupils' achievement in mathematics continues to rise. The most able readers speak confidently about their favourite books and authors, and there are also examples in pupils' science and history work in particular of teachers effectively providing the most able pupils with a good level of challenge. However, the picture in writing is less consistent from class to class. In some year groups, teachers have high expectations which pupils rise to impressively. In other classes, expectations are not as high and pupils are not provided with the challenge that they need to make the rapid progress that they are capable of.
- A major strength at St John Bosco is the quality of leadership shown by yourself and other leaders across the school. Leaders, including governors, share the

same high aspirations for the school. Middle leaders are becoming increasingly effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility. Governors provide an effective balance of support and challenge and ensure that the school budget is targeted at areas of most need, such as in the improvements made to the indoor and outdoor areas for early years. Staff are highly supportive and appreciate the range of professional development opportunities open to them. The school has good capacity to continue to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers give pupils enough opportunities to practise and develop their writing skills in a range of subjects, so that the rate of pupils' progress in writing is further accelerated
- teachers in key stages 1 and 2 have consistently high expectations of what pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve in their written work.

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 Sefton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you, four members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority and archdiocese. I also met a group of teaching and support staff and the leaders responsible for mathematics, English and early years. I considered 57 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of other pupils read. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at pupils' work across a range of year groups and subjects. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.