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Mrs Catherine Clubley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Clubley

Short inspection of St Peter's Catholic First School (Academy)

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 September 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, your deputy headteacher and academy committee (governors) provide effective leadership. Leaders, staff and governors have formed positive relationships with families. Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as those who provided written responses and those who had discussions with me, pay tribute to the work and commitment of your staff team. For example, summing up the views of most parents, one stated, 'My child loves this school. She gets upset when it is the school holidays as she misses the teachers!'

Your staff are all committed to the core values of the school, which, as you state in the prospectus, promotes 'a caring, happy and stimulating environment in which pupils of all abilities can achieve their full potential'. Good quality displays of pupils' art work and writing, including prayers written by pupils and used during assemblies and acts of worship, show that pupils' efforts are valued by all.

The staff value pupils' work and efforts. This is evident in the very good range of work in pupils' books and on display portraying the best examples of pupils' achievements. Outdoor learning, for example forest school and educational visits, motivates and enthuses pupils. You and your staff have been successful in maintaining a strong and stimulating curriculum which promotes British values of tolerance, respect and care in the local community. The school's ethos and core Catholic values are having a positive impact on pupils' academic and personal

development.

The deputy headteacher and early years' team have maintained strong provision for Reception-aged children since the previous inspection in 2013. This provision provides excellent foundations in children's personal and academic development, especially in developing language and literacy. Records and assessments of children's learning journeys show that they soon settle into routines. The children work independently and cooperatively with their classmates. The staff skilfully plan tasks that stimulate and interest the children. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development is above national figures, reflecting strong teaching and leadership of the early years. The children are well prepared for the next stage of their education in key stage 1. However, you and I recognised and agreed that the development of pupils' handwriting, spelling and punctuation in Years 1 and 2 is inconsistent and does not build on the excellent start made in the early years.

Since the previous inspection you have steered significant changes and improvements. In addition to becoming an academy as part of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Company, you and the governors have worked hard with middle leaders and staff to improve assessment information. Assessments are being used effectively to identify how much progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics. Last year's national key stage 1 assessments show that pupils made good progress overall in relation to their starting points at the end of the early years. Pupils' work and assessments show that good teaching is being sustained in Years 3 and 4 and enables pupils to make good progress.

The previous inspection reported some relative weaknesses in the progress and performance of disadvantaged pupils. Since then leaders and governors have improved the way they monitor pupil premium funding. In addition, you have made sure that teachers focus on tracking the progress of disadvantaged pupils. As a result of this increased vigilance, differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils who are not disadvantaged are narrowing.

The current focus on problem-solving in mathematics needs to continue as some of the most able pupils fall short of their expected learning targets. We discussed this and found that teachers do not always plan enough challenging opportunities for pupils to apply their reasoning skills when solving problems. I checked this with some pupils during lessons and when scrutinising some of their work in books. We agreed that pupils spend too much time guessing or learning through trial and error when trying to solve problems. The current focus on improving pupils' reasoning skills is the right one and needs to continue as this is helping pupils to apply more logical thinking when solving problems.

The deputy headteacher has good oversight of assessment information and regular reviews of pupils' progress help to keep track of their achievements. However, teachers are not always checking with sufficient frequency to see if pupils are on track to reach their mathematics targets. The work provided in some lessons is not sufficiently challenging. Leaders are aware of this, which is reflected in the priorities set out in the school's development plan and mathematics action plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and robust. Staff vetting procedures include systematic checks on visitors, volunteers, governors and supply staff. The indoor and outdoor areas, including an excellent range of stimulating resources and areas available for early years children, are clean, safe and secure. You have ensured that e-safety is a high priority. Pupils know what to do to keep themselves safe when using the internet or mobile devices. Risk assessments of all school activities are carried out routinely. You and the governors make sure that staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities by making sure that safeguarding and child protection training is carried out systematically. As you know, I checked the school's attendance procedures and the measures you and your staff adopt to deal with irregular attendance or persistent absenteeism. You and the staff team manage this well and work closely with vulnerable families, including those who are hard to reach. The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly and on time, and you go the extra mile to make sure that pupils are safe if not attending school by carrying out home visits and regularly keeping in touch with families. The vast majority of parents believe, rightly, that pupils are safe and secure in school.

Inspection findings

- Parents are right in their views that school leaders, staff and governors foster the values that lie at the heart of this school and across Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Company. Staff and governors are successful in promoting core British values of respect and tolerance of all world faiths, customs and traditions. Parents are very pleased with the regular and helpful workshops you and your staff organise. These are successful in helping parents to support and complement the work of the school at home, although some parents would like more regular and challenging homework for their children.
- Pupils enjoy school and wear their smart school uniform with pride. They are courteous and very well behaved at all times. I saw how happy pupils were as they arrived at school in the morning, keen to meet their friends and ready for the challenges ahead. As one child told me, 'I have lots of friends because this is a very caring and friendly school.' Others in the group agreed.
- You and your staff have maintained a strong and stimulating curriculum. Special themes, such as 'World Book Day' and the celebration of traditional or religious festivals energise and motivate pupils. These and other rich and stimulating experiences are reflected in high-quality displays of art, sculptures and records of special visits to places of interest.
- Improvements to teaching are being managed well. You and your deputy headteacher have adopted a range of strategies, for example by encouraging teachers and support staff to see and share best practice with other schools and utilising the best practice that exists across the school.
- The strong foundations laid in the early years prepares children very well for key stage 1. However, the development of pupils' handwriting in Years 1 and 2 does not build on these strong foundations. Handwriting is irregular and inconsistent in

form and structure, reflecting differences in teachers' expectations. Teachers and support staff in key stage 1 do not always intervene enough to help pupils correct punctuation and spelling mistakes, some of which are repeated over time.

- The teaching of phonics is consistent and national assessments show sustained improvements to the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics by the end of Years 1 and 2. Phonics teaching is also effective in helping pupils improve their confidence and skills when reading independently. Teaching assistants are deployed very well in classes to focus on early literacy and phonics skills, including by supporting effective intervention programmes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which successfully promotes language and communication skills.
- Catch-up programmes for groups and individual pupils who do not yet reach age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics are effective. However, the most able pupils should be doing better in mathematics. Across classes in Years 1 through to Year 4, these pupils are not being challenged enough when working out mathematics problems. You are focusing on this as it is a school priority in the development plan. Increasing opportunities are now being provided for pupils to tackle more varied number problems, although more is needed to enable them to apply logical thinking rather than relying too heavily on guesswork or trial and error.
- Assessments show that increasingly more pupils are reaching higher standards in mathematics. However, the most able pupils should be given more challenging learning targets to aim for in mathematics. There is scope now to redouble your efforts on ensuring that the progress and performance of the most able pupils is checked regularly so that they all reach higher standards and learn mathematics skills in greater depth.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue focusing on raising achievement in writing in key stage 1
- help pupils to improve the quality and consistency of their handwriting, spelling and punctuation
- build on current improvements to pupils' achievement in mathematics by:
 - providing more challenging and varied opportunities for pupils to apply logical thinking and reasoning skills when tackling problem-solving tasks
 - setting more challenging targets for the most able to aim for
 - checking more robustly at each stage of the year when pupil's progress is reviewed to make sure they all reach their individual targets in mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy committee, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner,

the directors of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Company and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the deputy headteacher regularly throughout the day's inspection. I also met with the chair, vice-chair and three members of the academy committee who are responsible for the governance of the school. Three members of the committee are also directors of the Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Company (MAC), the responsible body for St Peter's and three other schools within the MAC. We visited classes together to observe some teaching, looked at pupils' work in books and spoke to pupils during lessons. I also spoke to pupils during breaktime and lunchtime. I spoke to some parents at the start of the school day and considered the 75 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as comments sent by text to Ofsted's regional office. I scrutinised the school's development plan and action plans, monitoring files and assessments of pupils' work and progress. I checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.