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Mrs Michelle Woods
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Dear Mrs Woods

Short inspection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic First School

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 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. Since your appointment, you have ensured that the school continues to put the pupils at the heart of everything it does. You, the staff and governors all share the same deep commitment to providing all pupils with the best possible education. You are highly ambitious and have an enthusiastic drive for improvement which permeates throughout the school. You have successfully developed a culture where all staff grasp any opportunity to improve. As a result, teaching and learning is consistently good or better across the school, and outcomes for pupils continue to be strong.

As one pupil put it, 'I would score my school infinity out of ten because I love it.' All pupils I spoke to during the inspection shared this view. The pupils are happy, confident and extremely polite individuals, who show great pride in their school. Pupils strive to be the best they can be and look forward to earning rewards such as 'scientist of the month' or becoming one of the 'people of the week'. You ensure that there is a high focus on rewarding positive behaviour, but also provide pupils with a chance to reflect, if their behaviour is not acceptable. The high focus on Catholic values, closely linked with British values, further supports pupils' understanding of right and wrong, and how to be a good citizen. Consequently, behaviour across the school is exemplary, and pupils have a calm and supportive environment in which to learn.

Parents speak highly of the school and the support it provides to families. Parents especially value the excellent communication from the school and how welcoming all staff are. You and your staff work hard to ensure that families, as well as pupils, receive any support that is needed. One parent spoke for many by saying, 'If there is a problem, I come into school and they take it away.'

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve opportunities for good teachers to learn from those who are outstanding. You have successfully achieved this, especially with the support of the multi-academy company. Teachers value highly the opportunities they have to participate in 'buddy-coaching'. Teachers work together in pairs to support and develop one another's practice, which enables teaching strengths to be shared across the school. Further training and professional development is provided within the multi-academy company, with teachers and leaders learning from best practice across a range of schools. As a result, all teaching within the school is at least good, with an increasing proportion being outstanding.

A further focus from the last inspection was to provide more challenge for the most able pupils. Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 were above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportions of pupils attaining a greater depth of learning were also above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Over the last two years, you and your leaders have placed a high priority on developing the teaching and learning of mathematics across the school. Teachers develop pupils' mathematical skills well and give pupils many opportunities to apply these skills in a range of challenging reasoning and problem-solving activities. Therefore, pupils currently in school, especially the most able, are making at least expected progress, and in many cases good progress overall.

However, work currently in English books demonstrates that the most able pupils are not being consistently challenged enough in writing. Teachers are not using what they know about what pupils can achieve to plan activities which are sufficiently challenging. Some work in books is of a high quality, with pupils writing detailed and sophisticated pieces of writing at length. Subsequently, these same pupils are then asked to complete activities which are too easy. While books show that the most able pupils are making at least expected progress, in a number of cases these pupils are not making the progress of which they are fully capable in writing.

Over the last three years, outcomes at the end of the early years have risen and the proportions of children achieving a good level of development are now in line with national averages. The early years classrooms have been redeveloped and provide a bright and stimulating learning environment. The children are confident and happy and have positive relationships with all staff. Staff know the needs of the children well. However, staff do not consistently provide purposeful learning activities which fully meet the needs of some of the children. This is especially so for the most able. This is, in part, due to the organisation of the learning times which limits the opportunities for staff to effectively engage with the children to take their learning forward.

The early years leader is aware of this and is planning to develop the provision further to ensure that the learning activities meet the needs of all pupils, and consistently challenge the most able.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Safeguarding arrangements are monitored with great care. Checks on people working in the school are thorough, and newly appointed staff receive detailed safeguarding training prior to working in the school. Risk assessments are detailed, including those for pupils with additional needs, and health and safety checks ensure that the school site poses no risk to pupils.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They learn about e-safety and how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils have a clear understanding of what bullying is, but say it rarely happens in school. If pupils have any problems, they are confident that a teacher will sort them out. Teachers provide 'worry boxes' in classes, which enable pupils to share their concerns.

Inspection findings

- The local governing body is a strength of the school. The governors share the leaders' vision to provide the best possible education for all pupils and state that they 'provide support and challenge with equal relish' to achieve this vision. This is clearly evident. The governors have a detailed understanding of the school's performance and hold leaders to account for it. They embrace all support and value the opportunities to work with other schools across the multi-academy company. The governors are very forward thinking and recognise strongly the need to grow and develop within the family of schools in the company.
- Leaders place a high priority on developing the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers and all staff embrace support and professional development and have a desire to be the best they can be. Working collaboratively with schools across the multi-academy company enables staff to have high-quality, professional discussions to improve their practice across curriculum. A range of professional development opportunities, such as developing effective questioning skills, have further developed the quality of teaching. Supportive, yet challenging, appraisal systems are embedded and focus on key development areas for individuals. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning is at least good across the school, and there are increasing elements of outstanding teaching and learning.
- Pupils have a range of opportunities to write in different styles. English grammar, punctuation and spelling is taught well and regularly across the school, and is embedded within pupils' writing. Work in English books shows that pupils are making at least expected progress across the school. However, the most able pupils do not consistently have work which is sufficiently challenging. Their books show that they are capable of writing at a high level and with a style which fully engages the reader. However, teachers do not use what they know about what the most able pupils can achieve well enough to plan work which enables them

to make the progress of which they are fully capable. As a result, not enough most able pupils are making more than expected progress in writing.

- The early years leader has a good understanding of the early years provision, including the progress of different groups of pupils. Staff assess children's needs very quickly when they start school so that the right provision can be put in place to support them. Children have a very happy start to school life. Children are keen to share their learning and work cooperatively together. There has been a high focus on developing the personal, social and emotional needs of the children over this year. Work currently in learning journeys and books shows that children are making at least expected progress from their starting points. However, the learning activities provided are not consistently challenging enough for the most able pupils. Staff do not have enough opportunities to intervene quickly to take learning forward when needed. As a result, the most able children do not make the progress of which they are fully capable.
- Leaders track attendance in great detail. Where pupils are not attending school regularly enough, leaders work with the families to provide additional support to get the pupils into school. This has led to a strengthening of relationships with families. Absences are followed up immediately. The school has implemented a range of rewards to encourage high attendance. 'Marvin the monkey' is awarded to the class with the highest attendance each week, and 100% attendance is rewarded on a termly and yearly basis. These initiatives have led to attendance currently being above national averages.
- The multi-academy company provides excellent support and challenge to the school. It has a strong working relationship with the leaders and has drawn together a family of schools within the company. These schools work together effectively to improve outcomes for all pupils.
- Staff are extremely positive and all have a drive and desire to ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils. They work together as a close-knit team. The responses on the staff questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive, and supportive of the leaders. Teaching assistants provide effective support in classes.
- Leaders have placed a high priority on developing the pupil voice in school. The school council contributes to the school development plan, and gives its views on the curriculum. Leaders implemented the pupils' suggestions about how they would like to be introduced to their new classes at the end of the year. For example, teachers wrote letters and held story time sessions with the pupils, and pupils had more opportunities to visit their new classrooms.
- Pupils have a range of opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities. As one pupil said, 'There is something for everyone.' A range of sports clubs such as gymnastics, football, hockey and dance are held, as well as music and art clubs. Pupils can also attend a gardening club.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the early years provision is further developed to ensure that children, especially the most able, make the progress of which they are fully capable
- teachers consistently use what they know about what pupils can achieve in writing to plan challenging activities to enable the most able pupils to make the progress of which they are fully capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and four senior leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative of the multi-academy company. You joined me on brief visits to lessons. I talked to pupils about their learning and looked at examples of their work. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and to pupils after lunchtime. I observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime and breaktime. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school development plan, documents relating to keeping pupils safe, attendance figures and the most recent information about pupils' achievement. I considered 48 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and 26 responses to the questionnaire for staff. There were no responses to the pupil survey.