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Mrs Margaret Jackson
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Dear Mrs Margaret Jackson

Short inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Prior to your appointment in September 2016, the school had been without a substantive headteacher for two years. As an experienced and successful headteacher, you brought much-needed stability and a renewed drive for improvement. Although standards remained steady during the unsettled period, you rightly recognised that aspects of the school's work were not as effective as they should be. You acted quickly to make necessary changes to some important aspects of safeguarding. Your thorough and accurate evaluations of the school's work have set a clear course for improvement. Your determination to provide pupils with the best education possible is clearly evident in the changes you have made to important systems, such as assessment, staff appraisal and accountability for pupils' progress. Staff have appreciated your fair and empathetic approach to implementing change.

Strengthening the school's leadership structure to ensure that improvement is sustained has been a particular priority. You have ensured that the new deputy headteacher, who will join the school in September, is experienced and has the qualities needed to support the school's further improvement. The newly established assistant headteacher role and restructured staff teams are a useful move to further strengthen senior, middle and subject leadership. Adding to this is governors' strong commitment to the school's improvement. Governors bring a range of experience to their roles and provide good support and challenge for

leaders.

Many parents are happy with the standard of education provided for their children. They commented positively on the improvements that have occurred, their children's enjoyment of school and the good progress that their children are making. A number are unhappy that their children are not participating in sporting events, competitions and extra-curricular activities as much as they used to. You explained that this has been a temporary setback during the development and training of a new physical education (PE) leader. The range of extra-curricular activities this year is not dissimilar to that which is provided in many schools. However, as part of the work to redesign the curriculum, you were able to show me the extensive schedule of extra-curricular activities that will run from September.

The pupils I spoke to said that they enjoy coming to school and that lessons are interesting. Pupils said how much they like their teachers. One pupil's comment summed up the sentiments of many: 'Teachers are the best thing about this school. They're really cool and have a good sense of humour.' Pupils are acutely aware of the school's code of conduct and explained well the '3 Cs' of care, courtesy and commitment. I was also particularly impressed with the high quality of artwork around the school and the displays that reinforce important messages to pupils about keeping safe.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to increase the proportion of pupils attaining the highest levels by the end of key stage 1 and further improve standards in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. In the most recent published assessments for the end of key stage 1 (2016), the proportions of pupils attaining greater depth in their learning were not significantly different from the national averages. In the 2016 Year 6 mathematics tests, pupils' attainment was similar to that of pupils nationally. In the context of the much higher expectations of pupils' standards since the school was last inspected, these results reflect improvement. Pupils' achievement in reading is similar to that of pupils nationally. In writing, standards and progress are above average. By the end of Year 6, all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have achieved well in reading, writing and mathematics. Nevertheless, you are ambitious for pupils to reach their potential. As such, you have prioritised further improvements to develop the already good quality of teaching and the curriculum so that more pupils attain higher standards and greater depth in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children. Staff training in child protection is regular and up to date. All of the staff I spoke to demonstrated a clear and accurate understanding of the action to take in different safeguarding situations. In addition to the designated safeguarding lead, you and another senior leader are trained to the required standard. Records of referrals to children's services are comprehensive. These show that the designated safeguarding lead is

persistent in ensuring that pupils receive the necessary support.

Since your appointment, security of the school site has improved and pupil absences are now rigorously followed up. You have implemented a more robust approach to recording behaviour and incidents of bullying, and appointed a member of staff to champion anti-bullying. All allegations of bullying are investigated thoroughly. Records show that staff are vigilant in identifying and reporting any bullying or prejudice-based behaviour.

In my discussions with pupils, most of them said that behaviour is good. Pupils were frank in saying that some bullying occurs, but none said that it is a major issue or that they feel unsafe because of it. None of the parents I spoke to at the start of the inspection raised any concerns about behaviour or bullying. However, some parents who responded to the online survey did. I reviewed a much larger survey of parents' views undertaken by the school earlier in the year, which asked the same questions as the online survey, and had significantly more positive responses. I also reviewed a pupil survey that the school had conducted on the subject of bullying. The responses from the 60 pupils who completed this were very positive. The survey showed that five pupils said that they had experienced bullying, but in all cases the bullying was dealt with once they reported it to the school. The inspection evidence shows strong safeguarding systems, including educating pupils about bullying and what to do should it occur. However, this is not the perception of some parents. Leaders are aware that they need to address some parents' concerns on this matter.

Inspection findings

- The school's use of the pupil premium is very effective in improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils by the end of Year 6. When they leave the school, disadvantaged pupils have progressed well from their starting points. Most attain the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics and are well prepared for secondary school. Within this very positive context, the school's published assessment information shows some weaker performance of disadvantaged pupils in the early years and in the Years 1 and 2 phonics screening checks. These were lines of enquiry for the inspection, as was the school's pupil premium strategy since this did not identify these weaker aspects of pupils' achievement.
- The pupil premium strategy details how the premium is spent, but does not include the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils at the school. In the long term, this has not adversely affected pupils' outcomes by the end of Year 6. However, until your appointment, the weaker development and achievement of disadvantaged children in the early years and in the Years 1 and 2 phonics screening checks had not prompted additional funding for these areas. Your thorough evaluations of the school's work identified these areas as priorities for improvement. While governors ask questions about the effect of pupil premium spending, the strategy document does not support them in this task. This is because the evaluation criteria used are not aligned well enough to pupils' outcomes.

- Over time, disadvantaged children in the early years have not attained as well as other children, particularly in their communication and language, personal, social and emotional development and physical development. Crucial to children's achievement in these areas of learning, and others, is high-quality, daily outdoor learning experiences. You quickly identified that outdoor provision in the early years was inappropriate. The prompt action you took ensured some immediate improvements. You have secured necessary building work to transform outdoor provision from the start of the new academic year. Staff training and the addition of a further experienced early years practitioner are useful steps to strengthen early years provision and support your priority to improve the achievement of disadvantaged children in the early years.
- This school year there has been an increased focus on phonics. You appointed a member of staff with specific responsibility for phonics and have made some changes to the way phonics is taught. This has led to an increased proportion of disadvantaged pupils attaining the expected standard by the end of Year 1. Further changes are planned for the new academic year, including different approaches to the teaching of phonics to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Overall, improvements for this group of pupils have not been as marked as for disadvantaged pupils. The school's assessment information shows that pupils, who historically have not attained the expected Year 1 phonics standard by the end of Year 2, gained these skills in Year 3. This was evident in the pupils who read to me. Nonetheless, you are rightly prioritising the need for all pupils to attain this important skill as early as possible and before starting key stage 2.
- The three-year trend of low attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is being stemmed. You set an appropriately uncompromising expectation of good attendance for all pupils. You have ensured a more focused approach by staff to improving the attendance of pupils in these two vulnerable groups. Attendance data for this year shows an improving picture for disadvantaged pupils. Absence of some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is unavoidable. However, as with disadvantaged pupils, you recognise that further work is needed to ensure that attendance of pupils in these two groups improves towards the national average.
- You and governors recognise the school's duty to promote pupils' understanding of British values and diversity. You have been proactive in chairing meetings with local school leaders and governors and arranging training, with a focus on the protected characteristic of sexual orientation. This considered approach has been effective in determining the way forward for your school. You are currently auditing the school's resources to ensure that they represent the full range of diversity that pupils encounter in modern Britain. Teaching materials have been purchased and staff training is planned to strengthen provision. In the same way, you and governors are aware that the promotion of fundamental British values can be more pointedly developed within the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's pupil premium strategy provides clearer information about how spending will overcome barriers to educational achievement and enable them to evaluate critically the impact of spending on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes
- differences diminish between the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged children in the early years and other children nationally, and similarly between the phonics standards attained by disadvantaged pupils in Years 1 and 2 and other pupils nationally
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities equals the national average
- work underway to ensure that pupils develop an informed understanding of diversity and fundamental British values is embedded
- parents are assured about the school's work to maintain good behaviour and to prevent and tackle bullying.

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

Margot D'Arcy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and your acting deputy headteacher to discuss leaders' evaluations of the school's work and priorities for improvement. You and I observed learning and behaviour in a sample of lessons. I noted pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and met with a group of pupils from key stage 2 to discuss their views and experiences of the school. I spoke to other pupils informally at breaktimes. I considered the responses of six pupils to the online pupil survey, and of 60 pupils to a school survey about bullying. I listened to some pupils read and reviewed a sample of pupils' work. I analysed a range of school documentation, including that relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding. I also spoke to some staff about safeguarding. I considered documentation relating to leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning and reviewed records of governors' meetings. I met with three governors, the school's improvement adviser and a representative of Wirral local authority. I spoke to a group of six parents and reviewed 42 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, including 29 written comments. I also considered the responses of 143 parents to a school survey of parents' views. I considered 11 responses to the online staff survey.