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Kim Savage
Principal
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Dear Kim

Short inspection of St Wulstan's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 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 vice-principal and your assistant principal have established a clear ambition for how you want the school to be. This senior team has energetically and systematically taken the actions necessary to turn this vision into reality. As a result, even though there has been substantial turbulence in recent years, the school has improved since it opened as an academy.

You are well supported by the academy committee and the directors of the Saint Nicholas Owen Catholic multi-academy company (SNOMAC). The SNOMAC board of directors sets a clear, strategic direction for the school. Working through the academy committee, it effectively holds you to account for meeting expectations. The board and the academy committee effectively manage the business aspects of the school. Therefore, you and your senior leaders can focus time on the quality of education and care provided to pupils.

Your leadership team collects a wide range of evidence about how well pupils are learning. The team scrutinises this information closely to look for pupils who could do better. For example, you have looked at the results of this year's national writing assessments for Year 6 pupils. These show that some pupils did not attain as well as they should, given how these pupils had performed in previous years. Your senior leaders immediately unpicked the reasons for this and have amended plans for the teaching of writing to address the issues found.

You and your leadership team are skilled in bringing about improvements to the quality of teaching when necessary. You keep a close eye on what is working well and what could be better. If something needs to change, you act swiftly, yet with careful consideration. Your team gives teachers clear, helpful guidance on how to improve pupils' progress. They ensure that teachers follow this advice and that the necessary improvements happen.

Teachers and teaching assistants are committed to doing the best for their pupils. Effective training has helped teachers to become skilled at assessing what each pupil can do and in knowing what to teach next. Lessons are interesting and appropriately challenging. Pupils are motivated to work hard as a result. Teachers and teaching assistants present tasks skilfully, supporting pupils who need extra help, or moving pupils on quickly if they have grasped the idea. This is why pupils make good progress.

This is a happy school. You place great emphasis on promoting the emotional health and well-being of pupils and staff. For example, you are careful to consider teachers' workloads when making decisions about new policies and procedures. This helps teachers to focus their energy on caring for pupils and teaching them well. This, in turn, benefits pupils' welfare and the quality of their education.

Almost all of the 30 parents who shared their views about the school were full of praise. The parents said their children love coming to school and feel well cared for. They said their children are taught well and make good progress. Comments included overwhelming praise for the high degree of care, sensitivity and support provided for pupils who experience difficulties. A small, but notable, number of parents said the school could improve the quality of information provided to them. In particular, parents would like to be better informed about the reasons for some strategic and staffing decisions, as they feel these changes can affect their children directly.

Safeguarding is effective.

Catholic values provide a strong foundation for the care, trust and respect which is at the heart of the culture of this school. Therefore, pupils' safety, welfare and well-being are of paramount importance to you and your staff. You ensure that all staff are vigilant in spotting concerns and report them immediately. You manage this information sensitively and follow up issues carefully. Your policies and procedures ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for.

Relationships between the school and parents are strong and are based on trust. Staff work very closely with families to ensure that pupils who may be at risk get the help they need. Parents value the support they receive. If outside help is required, the school works effectively with relevant agencies to keep the pupil's needs uppermost.

Inspection findings

- The main focus of the inspection was to ascertain whether pupils achieve well. In particular, the inspector considered whether pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. Pupils' work and your own evidence of achievement over time confirm this to be the case. Pupils achieve good outcomes at the end of the early years foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Children settle into the Reception class very well. They quickly learn to follow school routines and play happily together. Teachers and teaching assistants build a detailed picture of children's skills. This information helps teachers plan stimulating activities that help children explore, investigate and learn well.
- The work in children's books shows that they make good progress over the Reception Year. Most reach a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class and are well prepared to move on into Year 1.
- A new approach to teaching phonics was introduced last year. This has been very successful. Children quickly learn how to recognise letters and the sounds they make. This gets them off to a good start with early reading and spelling skills.
- Teaching in key stage 1 builds on children's success in the early years. By the end of Year 2, pupils achieve well for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. The quality of their writing is particularly good.
- Pupils make good progress in key stage 2, particularly in reading and mathematics. Pupils' scores in the Year 6 national tests this year were above the national average in these subjects. Most pupils achieved an appropriate standard for 11-year-olds in the writing assessment. However, not many pupils produced the more sophisticated writing that shows a greater depth of understanding. Pupils' books show that most made good progress in Year 6. However, some could have gone further if they had been challenged more. Teachers have adapted their planning this year to inject higher expectations for more able pupils.
- The inspection also examined the impact of leaders' work to improve the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. This group of pupils is frequently absent. The issue is a major priority for the school's development plans for this year. The school tracks the absence of each pupil closely and works with parents to promote better attendance. This has had notable impact on the attendance and punctuality of some pupils. Nevertheless, some parents still allow their children to stay off school without good reason. Leaders are preparing to implement new ways to reward pupils for frequent attendance and tackle persistent absence.
- Parents are highly complimentary about the quality of education that their children receive. They say that the school is well led. A few, including some of those who responded to the Parent View survey, say that they are not satisfied with the quality of communication from leaders about decisions that can affect their children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- parents feel well informed about all aspects of school life.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of directors of the Saint Nicholas Owen Catholic 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

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with: the principal, vice-principal and assistant principal; members of the academy committee; and the chair of directors of the Saint Nicholas Owen Catholic multi-academy company board. I spoke informally to pupils in lessons. I looked at the 28 responses to the Parent View survey and spoke to two parents who had requested a discussion with the inspector. I visited lessons with the senior leadership team and looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding and child protection.