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Mrs Louise Sassi
Principal
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Springfield Road
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Dear Mrs Louise Sassi

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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 in the school since the last inspection. You and your colleagues have created a vibrant, happy school where pupils are able to thrive. Parents are positive about the provision their children receive and praise the welcoming approach you and your staff adopt. They particularly appreciate the strong commitment to pastoral care and recognise the high standards of academic achievement. As a typical parent commented, 'I'm so glad I chose this school for my children.'

You have only been in post since September 2017 but due to the excellent succession planning employed by the multi-academy company, the leadership transition has been seamless. You have continued to build on the school's many strengths and along with your team have swiftly set about addressing weaknesses.

You and your senior team have an accurate and precise view of current provision. Although you have only recently taken on the role of head teacher, you have a focused determination to build on the strong outcomes previously achieved by pupils. All leaders, ably supported by the multi-academy company, are fully involved in the improvement process and share your ambition. You look beyond the school to seek out outstanding practice and want to learn from the best. Staff share in the vision for continuous improvement and wholeheartedly engage in training, welcoming the opportunities presented to them.

The ethos and culture of your school are underpinned by your vision statement, to 'value and respect one another through the Catholic faith' and this is embodied throughout the school. Pupils are tolerant and respectful to adults and their peers. This is clearly demonstrated within lessons, where pupils work cooperatively and value different opinions. The harmonious atmosphere you and your team have created allows pupils confidence to grow and learning to flourish.

A key to the success of the school is the exceptional support and guidance received from the multi-academy company. Through clear strategic direction and comprehensive support, it promotes the highest standards for everyone within the school. This drive and ambition has led to a culture of continuous improvement, which is fully embraced by you and your leaders.

Since the last inspection, pupils have made strong academic progress and have attained standards above those seen nationally by the time they leave your school.

Your own assessment information and provisional information about statutory assessments at the end of key stages in 2017 show that these high standards are continuing. Outcomes are particularly strong at the end of key stage 2 and pupils build on the strong start they make in early years and key stage one. However, outcomes in phonics have decreased during the last three years and have declined from being well above national averages to slightly below. Both you and the English subject leader are aware of this decline and recognise that current provision needs further review. These plans, however, are in their infancy and have not yet had the desired impact on outcomes.

The development of middle leaders was a key area for improvement from your previous Ofsted inspection in June 2013. You have eradicated any weaknesses and the quality of their work is now a strength. Subject leaders regularly analyse performance information and ensure that these findings are used to inform future planning. Any weaknesses are quickly addressed and these improvements are reflected in whole-school provision. An example of this was in the development of a consistent approach to guided reading, a system which is now fully embedded.

The leadership of mathematics has been particularly successful. Both parental and pupil comments reflect the high regard that pupils have for this subject and the improvements that have been made. This is further illustrated by the strong outcomes in mathematics across the school.

Directors are highly experienced and their clearly defined roles help them to provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support. They are kept informed about the performance of the school through regular visits and updates. Through the role of link director the board keeps a close eye on the performance of pupils, especially those in receipt of pupil premium. As a result, they are clear about the impact of pupil premium funding and how effective it is in raising standards for disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all staff members have received regular and appropriate training and that they have a clear understanding about their safeguarding responsibilities. Records show that leaders manage referrals swiftly and provide detailed records which outline the actions taken.

Your detailed safeguarding policy is reflected in the practice within school. Staff have a clear understanding of procedures and are clear about what they need to do if they have any concerns. This understanding is further enhanced by regular updates and briefings provided by the multi-academy company.

You have recently made further improvements to your recruitment procedures; as a result of this robust approach, leaders ensure that rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults to work with children. Systems are efficient, organised and regularly reviewed and monitored by leaders.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They spoke in detail about how to evacuate the building in case of an emergency and the importance of keeping themselves safe online. These safety messages have been delivered in a variety of ways; pupils were particularly enthusiastic about the interactive assemblies and visits from local high school pupils which helped to support their understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- In 2016 test outcomes suggested that some of your most-able pupils were not making sufficient progress in reading. Provisional 2017 test outcomes show that by the end of key stage two most-able pupils are now making much better progress. During observations of reading across key stage 2, it was clear that pupils made rapid progress when working directly with the teacher or teaching assistant in small groups. However, this progress was less evident when pupils were working on a selection of independent tasks as these activities occasionally lacked the necessary challenge and expectation. Leaders are implementing appropriate plans to address this.
- Phonics is rightly an improvement focus for you this academic year. Results have declined over three years and are now below national averages. You are now reviewing provision so that you can adopt a clear, consistent approach to the teaching of phonics and ensure that activities provided for pupils during lessons are better matched to their needs.
- Pupils were positive about the provision they receive in other subjects across the school. They especially enjoy the trips and visits you integrate into your topics, such as the Year 5 visit to Churnet valley for an evacuee experience; typically pupils commented that 'this makes learning fun'. Leaders have recognised that outcomes in science were below the national average in 2016 and have worked to improve outcomes for pupils in this area. Links facilitated through the multi-academy company have allowed your subject leader to work closely with a science specialist teacher, ensuring that all staff are clear about the expectations

for science across the school. However, these high expectations are not reflected in all subjects across the wider curriculum, especially within history and geography where progression in key skills, such as those required for map work, are not always evident.

- The multi-academy company has provided excellent support to enhance the quality of leadership and teaching and learning across the school and is widely valued by all staff members.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Teachers take more account of pupils' current skills and knowledge in phonics, so that planned activities allow more pupils to make rapid progress from their starting points.
- Skills taught in history and geography are more carefully tracked, so that the quality of provision in these subjects matches that which is seen in English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Josie Leese
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy company and your senior leaders about the developments since the last inspection, your evaluation of the impact of your work and the effectiveness of safeguarding. I also spoke to the chair of directors.

I took account of 29 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also spoke to a number of parents at the school gates. In addition, I took into account the 16 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 27 responses to the pupils' questionnaire. I spoke to a number of pupils at lunchtime and took their views into account.

You accompanied me to observe learning in a range of different lessons. We also conducted a work scrutiny together. I scrutinised assessment information, school improvement documentation and took into account information about the quality of teaching and learning.