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Mrs Justine Page
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Page

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

You started as the headteacher in September 2017 and have swiftly established an ethos in which 'good is not enough'. Your passion and enthusiasm for learning have ensured that your vision of 'the very best standards of education for all pupils' is willingly shared by your dedicated and supportive staff team.

Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of you and are incredibly positive about the changes you have made. Parents who spoke to me during my visit, and almost all of those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, highly commend the work you and your staff do. Ninety-seven per cent of parents would recommend the school. You have a very clear direction for the school, and the school community is right behind you on your journey.

The school environment is bright and inviting, with displays celebrating pupils' work and achievements. Staff ensure that there is a purposeful focus on the use of resources to support pupils to become independent learners. It was a delight to be welcomed so warmly by the class ambassadors and to listen to pupils describing how they use resources to help them learn. For example, pupils told me how being able to hold and compare household items, such as a tin of beans and a bag of sugar, helped them quickly understand the concept of weight and kilograms. The previous inspection report stated that, to improve further, the school needed to

focus on ensuring that teaching and learning, especially in mathematics, were consistently good or better across the school. You have accelerated the work you and your assistant headteachers undertake to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, and there have already been some very positive results. During our learning walk, we saw teachers using a range of strategies that help pupils make consistently good progress in almost all classes.

Evidence from speaking with pupils and looking at their work in books shows that pupils are making good and sometimes accelerated progress in mathematics. Pupils' attainment in the national tests in 2016 and 2017 at key stage 1 and key stage 2 was above the national average. In the best examples of pupils' books, teachers set work which is challenging, and pupils are challenged to apply their reasoning and problem-solving skills. However, this is not consistent in every year group, and you identify the need to improve this further, especially for the most able pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created an environment where pupils feel safe, and staff and parents speak highly of the care and attention pupils receive. All staff are effectively trained to identify signs of harm and maintain detailed and well-considered logs of any concerns. Your team of designated safeguarding leaders works effectively with external agencies to ensure that, when needed, families have access to appropriate support services that meet their needs.

You ensure that pupils have their opinions heard. Your weekly 'tea with the head' ensures that a wide range of pupils have the opportunity to share their thoughts on their education, address any worries and celebrate successes. Pupils are happy. They state confidently, 'Bullying doesn't happen here but if it did we could speak to our trusted adult.'

All safeguarding records are of a high quality. The single central record is meticulously detailed, and all checks for the recruitment of staff are in place. Governors check, but do not regularly document, that safeguarding processes are implemented rigorously.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry, because you were new to post, was to establish the impact of your new leadership on sustaining standards since September. On arrival, you quickly identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Your enthusiasm and passion are evident in the speed at which you have refreshed the learning environments and set a clear and precise action plan.
- Leaders have worked collaboratively with the local authority to provide effective support for teachers who would benefit from it. This includes diminishing the difference in outcomes between boys' and girls' writing skills.
- You and your English leader's work to improve standards of presentation has

produced impressive results. Pupils' books demonstrate a significant improvement in the use of cursive handwriting and pupils have an increased pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils who spoke with me were eager to show me how much their handwriting had improved as a result of this work.

- Additionally, our scrutiny of pupils' writing from the beginning of the year demonstrates that they are no longer constrained by a prescribed set of questions and, consequently, the depth and quality of pupils' writing have improved.
- The previous inspection report identified the need to make more teaching and learning good and outstanding. Therefore, the second key line of enquiry related to how well the quality of teaching and learning had been sustained and improved.
- We saw some excellent examples of teachers using incisive questions to get pupils to think about and explain why and how they had arrived at their answers. For example, Year 5 pupils expanded their mathematical knowledge to predict the number of factors that could be produced if they used prime or square numbers.
- You acknowledge that while you and your leadership team have seen clear indications of improvement since September, further work is required to embed the use of formative assessment. Then teachers can more rapidly respond to pupils' needs, especially adapting questioning to stretch the most able pupils.
- My final key line of enquiry was to look at how effectively pupils apply their English and mathematical skills across the curriculum. This was because while standards are high, and attainment in 2017 at key stage 1 and key stage 2 in all areas was at least in line with the national average, pupils could make even better progress.
- Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 regularly use their mathematical skills in the outside learning environment. Work in pupils' science books shows how they consistently apply their data handling skills well to record experiment results.
- Subject leaders have increased the opportunities pupils have to apply their writing skills across the curriculum. Pupils are consistently using their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills in subjects other than English.
- Standards of presentation in books and pupils' handwriting are equally good across all subjects. You have identified newly appointed subject leaders not yet taking full responsibility for monitoring and improving their subject area as an area for improvement.
- Prior to the inspection, the school's website did not give an up-to-date overview of the curriculum provision. You highlighted quickly that your website is being updated. Before I left the school, your website was compliant and up to date.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- across all classes and year groups, the stretch and challenge for most-able pupils are consistent, enabling them to make rapid progress from their starting points
- subject leaders take increasing responsibility for the monitoring and development of their subjects, including increasing opportunities for pupils to practise and transfer their English and mathematical skills across the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Westminster, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kerry Grubb-Moore
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, your assistant headteachers and a selection of subject leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator. As one of my key lines of enquiry related to the wider curriculum, we reviewed an extensive range of pupils' work including English, mathematics, geography, history, science, religious education and the work pupils produce in the outside learning environment. I also met with a group of most-able pupils from Year 5 and Year 6 to discuss their work.

Together, we visited all classes, including the mathematics morning attended by parents and the Nursery and Reception classes. We looked at pupils' work and spoke to a large proportion of pupils while we were in lessons. I observed pupils' conduct around school, in lessons and at playtime.

I held meetings with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I also reviewed a range of school documentation, including governors' minutes; your school's development plan and self-evaluation document; safeguarding and recruitment records; child protection files; behaviour and safeguarding policies; the school's website; and information relating to pupils' progress. I also reviewed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and responses from 73 parents, as well as 101 pupil responses and 19 staff responses.