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Mrs Rachel Kershaw
Acting Headteacher
Cottesmore St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Kershaw

Short inspection of Cottesmore St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since being appointed as acting headteacher in September 2017, you have led the school smoothly through a period of staff change. Your inspirational leadership has created a team whose members have an unrelenting acceptance of nothing but the best for all the pupils in their care. You have also sustained a culture of caring and kindness throughout the school. The uniqueness of each child is celebrated and valued. One parent told me, 'I feel the staff at Cottesmore really do care about my child and her well-being.'

Parents and pupils appreciate the harmonious community you and your team have built. One pupil told me, 'Everyone is inclusive – it doesn't matter who you are or what level in work you are.' Parents spoke of their love of the school, the dedication of teachers and the individual care and attention that their children receive. Pupils at the school feel safe and say that bullying is rare. They appreciate the care shown to them by adults. Older children help younger children across the school and in the playground. Parents appreciate that new arrivals are given a 'buddy' to help them settle in quickly. This contributes well to pupils' sense of belonging to a family within the school.

You lost no time in responding to a dip in standards in key stage 1 phonics last year. Further training has increased teaching expertise and pupils are now making more rapid progress. Parents are better placed to help their children following the introduction of workshops to explain how phonics is taught. Regular assessment and monitoring of

progress ensure that any child who is falling behind is quickly given additional support to catch up.

Progress in mathematics has recently been slower than progress in reading and writing. Together with your senior leaders and governors, you have reacted in a prompt and effective manner to rectify this. Expectations for all pupils in mathematics have now been raised. Tasks are chosen more carefully so that pupils tackle more demanding work. Pupils told me how they love the challenge of mathematics and how their confidence in the subject has grown. As a result, pupils are now making more rapid progress and are well placed to achieve better outcomes this year.

Middle leaders were keen to tell me how well you have supported them in their new roles. They feel that they have been guided through every stage and now feel that they have the freedom and your trust to lead. They are increasingly accountable for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement within their areas of responsibility. You have rightly identified that they are now well placed to play a stronger part in driving improvements.

The local authority has recognised your excellent leadership. It appreciates your speed of response to areas for improvement and how well initiatives are maintained until outcomes improve. They acknowledge the growing strength of middle leaders to support and challenge teachers.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised many strengths in the school, including pupils' behaviour and excellent attitudes to learning. These strengths have been maintained. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Pupils are keen to learn and hard working in lessons. They work well together and delight in one another's achievements. They speak eloquently and confidently about their learning and know what they need to do to improve.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were tasked with improving the curriculum so that it provided maximum opportunities for learning. The school's whole curriculum now provides rich, planned opportunities that inspire all groups of pupils. Through their experience of art, music, forest school, history and religious education (RE), pupils practise and extend their skills and experience in reading, writing and mathematics.

Teachers were also asked to consistently check pupils' learning throughout lessons so that all make the progress they should. Teachers now make good use of prior assessment of the children to plan tasks which are challenging. In mathematics, pupils move quickly through increasingly demanding levels within a lesson. They persevere through challenge, and teachers are quick to support and guide. As a result, learning is fast paced and progress is good.

Your current improvement plans are ambitious for the school. You are determined that attainment for all pupils will rise, particularly in mathematics and phonics. You also want to develop leaders to further support and challenge teachers.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are understood and applied by staff and governors, including those new to the school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and regularly updated in line with current statutory guidance. The site is secure and well maintained. Entry to the building is stringently controlled. Staff and governors are clear about procedures for keeping children safe and what to do if concerns arise. Records show that the school works closely with outside agencies to protect pupils from neglect or abuse. Families in crisis are well supported.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, for example when working online on the computer. They say that they feel adults are always there to listen to their concerns.

Inspection findings

- A focus of this inspection was to check how well leaders at all levels ensure that pupils' progress throughout the school in mathematics and phonics is as good as it can be. Pupils at Cottesmore are high attaining. A greater than average proportion reach the expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stages 1 and 2. However, while outcomes in mathematics are high, they are not quite as strong in key stage 2 as in reading and writing. Outcomes in phonics have declined in the last two years, although they are still in line with national averages. You have made mathematics and phonics a priority. Your ambitious improvement plans include appropriate and measurable targets. Governors wisely use their visits to keep a watching brief on how these targets are being met. Governors engage in a range of development opportunities, including training in assessment procedures and the interpretation of data. They have the knowledge and skills to hold leaders to account. Because of your work, progress in mathematics and phonics is now improving.
- I also looked at whether the pupil premium funding is used effectively to enable the most able pupils to do as well as possible. You have ensured that there is an unremitting focus on tracking the progress and attainment of these pupils. Additional support, where needed, is quickly given. For example, a specialist mathematics teacher works with individuals daily. You have also introduced opportunities for pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding to discuss their writing in detail with an adult. As a result, standards in writing for these pupils rose last year to be in line with those of all pupils nationally.
- I reviewed attendance to check how well the school ensures that pupils, especially those who are vulnerable, attend regularly. Attendance overall is higher than national expectations. In the very few cases of persistent absence, the school follows the appropriate legal processes rigorously. There is case study evidence that targeted work by school leaders has improved some pupils' attendance from significantly low levels.
- I checked provision in early years to see how well children are prepared for Year 1. Children make good progress in early years from starting points which are below typical for their age. An increasing number of children speak little or no English on entry. Maximum attention is paid to improve children's speaking and listening skills. High levels of adult intervention and targeted support ensure that children make significant progress in communication skills. Children make accelerated progress in all areas of learning so that achievement on entry to Year 1 is in line with national averages. Parents have been

positive in how well their children settle and quickly grow in confidence.

- I looked to see how well the curriculum supports pupils' enjoyment of learning. Under your leadership, the curriculum provides rich experiences, such as in art and music. As one pupil said, 'Even being in the art room brightens my day.' The children find the curriculum exciting. There are many opportunities to write from first-hand experiences, such as residential trips, forest school and re-enacting history. In the future, an on-site replica of an Anglo-Saxon settlement being built on the school grounds will add to pupils' experiences. Classroom displays celebrate pupils' high-quality cross-curricular work in mathematics, history, RE, art and science.
- Pupils are taught to understand British values and appreciate their importance. They are aware of the diverse nature of society and say, 'We welcome everyone.' The emotional well-being of pupils is a school priority. There is a consistent approach throughout the school to teaching children to develop resilience, perseverance, thoughtfulness and self-esteem. Pupils speak confidently about building their 'learning muscles' and not giving up at the first difficulty they encounter. They are very proud of their school and are engaged in various charitable causes. They have a well-developed sense of right and wrong and expressed their enjoyment of assemblies which helped them to think about values. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders further develop their skills to monitor teaching and learning so that they provide excellent guidance and support for teachers
- strong teaching continues to develop in early years and key stage 1 so that all pupils make the progress in phonics of which they are capable
- the teaching of mathematics further strengthens to increase pupils' progress so that attainment in mathematics matches that in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you, and your senior and middle leaders. I also met with representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I observed the quality of learning with you in several year groups. I considered a range of evidence, including: the school's latest assessment information; the

school improvement plan; leaders' self-evaluation; pupils' work; and child protection procedures and policies.

I observed behaviour at playtime. As well as talking to pupils in lessons, I met with a group of pupils from different year groups to talk about their experience of school. I looked at a range of pupils' books together with your middle and senior leaders. I viewed the 90 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 23 questionnaires from staff and 68 questionnaires from pupils. At the beginning of the day, I had conversations with parents and carers.