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4 April 2018

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Dear Mrs Fusi

Short inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018, 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 April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school provides a happy and vibrant learning environment in which pupils feel safe. Pupils, members of staff and the vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the online surveys have positive views about how well the school meets pupils' needs. One parent, who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, wrote: 'Brilliant school. My son loves coming into school. His confidence has grown and he has learned so much already and continues to be developed and challenged.'

Your school improvement plan and self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness are closely linked. You and the governing body regularly assess the progress you are making against your proposed actions. You have correctly identified the challenges the school faces and are making sound progress in addressing these.

You acknowledge that pupils' progress needs to improve further, particularly for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, those who have middle prior attainment and for the most able pupils. Standards have clearly improved in the early years, which is now a strong aspect of your school's provision. Improvements have also taken place in key stage 1. The teaching of phonics is particularly effective, and the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check rose to above the national average in 2017. You have appointed a new senior postholder who oversees both the early years and key stage

1. This enables a smooth transition for children in the early years to the next stage of their school career, and this is also aided by regular and meaningful communication with parents. Your main challenges are to improve pupils' progress as they move towards the end of key stage 2, most notably in mathematics.

My visits to lessons confirm your view that pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. I was particularly impressed with your classroom ambassadors who confidently welcomed me to their classroom, and provided me with information on what they were learning. I observed pupils working diligently and supporting their classmates who shared their tables.

You enrich your pupils' learning and develop leadership skills beyond the classroom through a range of clubs, and also by providing them with different roles and responsibilities. These include being members of the school council and supporting pupils as playground buddies.

The governing body knows the school's strengths and understands the challenges that remain. Governors have a good awareness of the work of different subject areas and keep themselves informed through linking themselves to subjects and meeting with the subject leads. They have conducted 13 such visits so far this term. Such visits enable them to hold senior leaders to account very well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strong aspect of the school's culture. Staff have received and read all of the necessary documentation, which includes guidance and policies. Staff have a very good awareness of the procedures for making a referral with regard to a child's well-being. You maintain very detailed records relating to safeguarding, using your online system. These records reference all conversations about the child in question, the involvement of external agencies, actions taken, and resolutions.

The governor responsible for safeguarding has much relevant experience, and has routinely checked the single central record of recruitment checks to ensure that it is compliant with current requirements. He also met with a group of pupils to question them about how safe they feel in school.

Inspection findings

- I looked at how well the school's leaders and governors had addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. All subjects now have an evaluation week which includes scrutiny of pupils' work. This enables leaders to check the suitability of challenge being provided to pupils.
- I observed teachers directing pupils in lessons to choose tasks which pushed them to the next level. Most pupils choose a suitably challenging task, and pupils told me that their teacher would pick up quickly if they went for the easier option. Teachers have become more adept at identifying any misconceptions of what pupils are being taught. They then address these misconceptions in the

following lesson. Appropriate training has been provided to class teachers in mathematics which enables them to teach this subject with more confidence.

- Your use of 'pink polishing' pens by pupils has been extended beyond English lessons to mathematics. This method is used frequently and exposes pupils to words and phrases which feature in problem-solving activities. They are actively encouraged to use their problem-solving skills in mathematics. For example, pupils might be asked to explain in detail why 9.9 is greater than 8.9. I saw this strategy being used across a range of year groups, and pupils told me it helps them develop their reasoning skills.
- Your lead teacher for mathematics has conducted an audit to see how mathematics skills are covered and developed across other subjects taught in school. This coverage is much broader than at the time of the previous inspection. On the day of this inspection, pupils in Year 3 had been out in the town centre as 'street detectives' to conduct a traffic survey. They then returned to school and planned to reflect their findings in the form of bar charts.
- Pupils' attendance over time has been broadly in line with the national average. However, the rate of persistent absence increased for the first time to above the national average in 2017. You presented a number of convincing and detailed case studies to explain why this came about, which included medical issues and pupils relocating without following the correct notification procedures. Your documentation shows that you follow up on all absences with determination until you assure yourselves of the whereabouts of the child in question.
- Your drive to tackle the absence of disadvantaged pupils has reaped rewards, so much so that this group of pupils now attend school more regularly than their non-disadvantaged classmates.
- You have taken appropriate action to ensure that pupils with middle prior attainment are improving their progress in reading and writing. This group of pupils achieved less well at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 and was the largest group of pupils in Year 6. Teachers apply your assessment policy well, providing detailed and informative written feedback as required. This, as well as skilfully targeted questioning and booster sessions, ensures that pupils with middle prior attainment are challenged to achieve more highly.
- You have rightly prioritised boys' writing this year. However, you have also ensured that all pupils regularly receive active teaching of spelling and grammar throughout the week. This work is having a positive impact on the raising of standards across the school.
- English teaching has been enhanced through your decision to introduce your 'reciprocal reading' scheme. In these sessions, I saw pupils eagerly and routinely taking on various roles within their groups when reading through their chosen story. They were able to articulate well when talking about characters in the story or when trying to find out the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Your most able pupils have not achieved as well as they should in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 for the last three years. My productive meeting with your lead teacher for mathematics shows that she has written a sound action plan which features actions to ensure that this group of pupils make better progress.

You identify pupils in Year 5 who require more targeted support, which indicates that you are thinking ahead, rather than reacting to a situation when it may be too late. You also wisely focused on a group of girls in the summer term last year when they were in Year 5, in order to instil in them greater confidence. These girls received mathematics booster sessions before school which helped them to start Year 6 with a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.

- You spoke to me during this inspection of your continued focus on ensuring that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities achieve as well as they should. I observed effective practice taking place in lessons through the use of well-designed resources and targeted support from teaching assistants. These colleagues are keen to play a key role in making the learning more accessible for this group of pupils. On the day of this inspection, teaching assistants were attending a session led by the local authority on helping pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities improve their writing skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- maintain the focus on developing and improving the quality of teaching of mathematics in key stage 2, particularly for the most able pupils, so that a greater proportion make above-average progress
- continue to implement and monitor the impact of the strategies to improve the outcomes of specific groups of pupils, including those with middle prior attainment and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

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

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other senior leaders, as well as middle leaders, to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I met with the chair and three other members of the governing body to gain their views on the school. I also met with a representative of 'Herts for Learning', as well as a group of most-able pupils who also showed me examples of their work. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation summary document and the school's plans for improvement. I held a meeting to examine the school's safeguarding and child-protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of

staff to work with children and information relating to behaviour and attendance. I undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning when visiting lessons. I took account of the views of 15 staff and 57 pupils who responded to the online survey. I also considered the 73 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.