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Mrs Rebecca Nash  
Executive Principal  
St Brigid's Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Nash

### **Short inspection of St Brigid's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 your school was converted to become an academy within the Lumen Christi Catholic multi-academy company in April 2015. The predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Expertly led by you, the head of school, the senior leadership team and the local academy committee, leaders have created a strong culture of collaborative leadership. You are highly focused on raising standards for all groups of pupils and outcomes are continuing to rise across the school.

You provide a curriculum that is very well thought out in relation to pupils incrementally acquiring skills and knowledge. In addition, you give pupils the opportunity to go on numerous trips and visits to make learning realistic. For example, pupils from Year 1 visited the Black Country Museum to learn about life during the Victorian times.

Your systems of accountability are robust and provision for different groups of pupils is tailor-made to their needs. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and pupils with who are disadvantaged, make good progress in all subjects in relation to their starting points.

Your improvement strategies are successful and pupils leave Year 6 securing rates of progress that are at least in line with those found nationally in most subjects.

Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics checks are consistently higher than the national averages, and this prepares pupils well for reading as they move up the school.

You have successfully addressed the dip in writing in 2016 by ensuring that teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to write in other subjects. Your outcomes for English grammar, punctuation and spelling are strong. We saw this in pupils' writing, which demonstrates secure application of, for example, subject-verb agreements and the use of correctly spelt vocabulary.

In the classes for older pupils, we observed pupils making fast progress. This is because teachers help pupils improve their writing by showing them how authors craft their work, and the impact that the use of grammar, such as alliteration, has on the reader. Pupils in Year 6 enjoyed debating the author's choice of words, such as 'green grime', to create an image for the reader. Throughout the school, pupils make swift progress in developing handwriting. Their workbooks are very well presented because of the emphasis that you have placed on teaching good presentation skills from the early years onwards, such as joined-up writing.

You have placed a high focus on ensuring that children in the early years foundation stage and key stage 1 pupils acquire good knowledge of the structure of traditional tales. This helps them to develop their reading and writing skills as they move up the school. In key stage 1, pupils are able to retell these stories with great accuracy, and their writing shows secure awareness of sequencing episodes in the right order.

In 2017, outcomes show that pupils of middle prior attainment and those with low starting points made the strongest progress. Nevertheless, as you saw when you accompanied me to classes, pupils who are of high prior attainment, including higher-attaining disadvantaged pupils, could be challenged even further in mathematics. This was particularly the case in the younger classes of key stage 2 and is because, too often, these pupils repeat work that they already know.

We discussed one of the issues that prevents teachers from consistently challenging higher-attaining pupils. Your current tracking system does not identify, in sufficient detail, the particular areas that these pupils need to work on. Additionally, the tracking system does not give you precise enough information on the progress of the different groups. You have to work this out manually and this is very time-consuming.

Your previous inspection highlighted the need for you to improve progress in mathematics. You have rectified this by giving staff access to training in teaching mathematics, especially in teaching skills of mastery. However, as we saw in lessons, there is still some work to do in relation to challenging the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. You are aware of this and have already booked a mathematics consultant to explore this with your staff. Furthermore, you are sourcing further training to help teachers fully understand the skills they need to teach pupils to achieve greater depth in reading and in writing.

Parents and carers spoken to, and those who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, are very satisfied with the standard of education and their children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Those that I spoke to said that there is never a dull moment and that their children love coming to school, as demonstrated by the above-average attendance rates. They also spoke about how their children grow in confidence through the many opportunities that they have to participate in the liturgy.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You are very aware of your duties in relation to safeguarding pupils and you communicate updates regularly at staff meetings. In order to check staff's understanding of safety protocols that need to be followed, senior leaders devise quizzes to ensure that any misconceptions are quickly rectified. Records of pupils who have been identified as needing support from external agencies are detailed and include the actions that the school takes to keep pupils safe.

Parents say that 'you can touch the ethos of safety' as soon as you walk into the school. This is because of the strict protocols around using mobile phones, collecting children, and ensuring that information pertaining to absence is reported immediately. The school has kept a vigilant overview of pupils who are absent from school and has systematically worked with parents. As a consequence, attendance has improved and is now above that seen nationally.

In 2016, rates of attendance for some pupils who have education, health and care plans were below national levels. This was due mainly to them having to attend hospital appointments. The local academy committee understands the issues in the local community faced by some families and has employed an education welfare officer to help parents get their children to school on time. A breakfast club has been set up and this is having an impact on both improved punctuality and attendance.

The curriculum has been enhanced to help pupils learn about safety. You have successfully introduced an e-safety week and an anti-bullying week. Pupils I spoke to know about the importance of safe use of the internet. They have a very mature approach to the steps that need to be taken in order to feel safe in different situations. All pupils know the importance of five fingers on one hand that represent the five trusted adults they have in the school. Consequently, any bullying, should it occur, is 'nipped in the bud'.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, I met with you and your leaders to discuss the school's strengths and areas for development, as identified by your self-evaluation and school development plan. As a result of our discussion, we agreed to look at several lines of enquiry to decide whether a good standard of education is being maintained. We looked at how well you monitor and

strategically prioritise areas for improvement. We explored the school's ethos of safeguarding. We looked at the steps you have taken to narrow the gender gap in attainment between boys and girls throughout the school. We also looked at the way in which you use your funding for disadvantaged pupils to accelerate their rates of progress, particularly those disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment.

- Your monitoring of all aspects of provision and outcomes is very thorough. No stone is left unturned in the way that you monitor teaching and learning. You have ensured that all staff are now aware of information from national tests. Staff in each year group are responsible for ensuring that pupils attain at least age-related expectations. You and your senior leadership team ensure that information is shared with all teachers, including support staff. This way, everyone is clear as to what needs to be done in order to raise standards. Teamwork is highly effective throughout the school.
- You have ensured that all staff performance management targets are aligned to information from assessments and objectives from the school development plan. You monitor progress towards them in your regular pupil progress reviews, giving support where needed.
- You seek advice from your school improvement partner, and you ensure that subject leaders produce accurate self-evaluation reports and improvement plans. As a result of your focused strategies, you successfully improved outcomes in writing, from 59% at age-related expectations in 2016 to 78% in 2017. Pupils' books demonstrate that they are now aware of the how to incorporate what they have read into their writing by using adventurous vocabulary.
- Your school improvement plan, while identifying all the correct areas for development, does not yet make reference to expected outcomes for different groups. This is partly because you have a cumbersome tracking system that does not give you the information that you need quickly and efficiently enough. As a result, the local academy committee does not have the most up-to-date information on the impact of provision on outcomes. This prevents its members from making even more informed decisions on the allocation of resources.
- You have taken effective steps to redress the gender imbalance in outcomes between boys and girls. For example, you have purchased a wide range of reading books that engage boys' interests. You have altered the curriculum by ensuring that all topics start with a trip or visit, so that boys can see the relevance of learning in real life. You have set up nurture groups and counselling sessions for those boys who, as a result of their emotional needs, have identified barriers to learning.
- In the early years foundation stage, the outdoor classroom has been developed for boys to practise basic skills. A sharp focus has been placed on adults interacting on a one-to-one basis with boys to develop their language and thinking skills. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has risen from 63% in 2016 to 77% in 2017. Current data and children's work show that the children in the Reception class are making good progress.

- Spending of pupil premium funding is very carefully monitored and is used well to support disadvantaged pupils to acquire secure skills in reading, writing and mathematics. This has been effective for pupils with low and middle prior attainment. However, it has not been as effective for the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils, especially in mathematics in the younger classes in key stage 2. Work in books shows that, too often, they repeat work that they already know, spend too long on practising the same skill and are not applying what they have learned in other contexts.
- Systems for identification of barriers to learning and support given to disadvantaged pupils are very carefully documented, and every pupil has a detailed action plan for intervention. However, the impact of some of these interventions is not easy to ascertain because the school is not effectively evaluating in sufficient detail the impact of these interventions on pupils' learning. Senior leaders and the local academy committee have already identified this and are taking actions to redress this imbalance.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements are made to the school tracking system so that it provides more useful information on the progress of different groups
- the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils in the younger classes in key stage 2 are consistently challenged in mathematics to move on in their learning, once they have mastered particular mathematical concepts.

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

Yours sincerely

Bogusia Matusiak-Varley  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school, the leader responsible for the early years foundation stage, the inclusion manager and the leaders of English and mathematics. I met with the chair and three members of the local academy committee, and eight parents.

I carried out short lesson observations with you and the head of school in all classes other than Year 1, as they were on a school trip. I considered a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, notes of

contact with your school improvement partner and your analysis of the performance of pupils currently in the school. I analysed your current staff training and looked at pupils' behaviour during playtimes and lunchtimes. I looked at a range of information pertaining to safeguarding, including the single central record and your recent safeguarding review.

I spoke to pupils about behaviour in the school and safeguarding during the school day. I looked at attendance records, especially of pupils who had high levels of absence, and behaviour records, including one case study. I also listened to readers from Year 2 who did not reach the required standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1.