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Mrs Anna Murphy
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Dear Mrs Murphy

Short inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 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. Together, you have ensured that St John Fisher Catholic Primary School remains a vibrant, purposeful place to learn, underpinned by its strong, distinctive Catholic ethos.

You have established an effective leadership team. Governors, leaders and staff share your vision and passion for improving the learning experiences of every individual. You have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Consequently, you have clearly focused on the correct priorities and are taking effective action to address areas of weakness. An example of this is the improvements you have made to the provision for English grammar, punctuation and spelling (EGPS), following a dip in results in 2017. These improvements have had a clear impact on the development of pupils' skills, which, in turn, is beginning to improve the quality of pupils' writing. You rightly acknowledge, however, that there is still more to do to improve standards in writing further.

The school is rightly proud of its Catholic ethos. The school achieves its aim to ensure that 'together with Christ; we love, learn and pray as one family'. Staff and pupils are happy and proud of their school. During the inspection, pupils were keen to share their learning experiences with us when we visited them during their lessons. They could clearly explain what they were learning about and demonstrated an enjoyment in learning. They are polite and well mannered, and their conduct around the school is good.

The early years leads the way in ensuring that children get off to a good start. Children enter the school with skills and abilities that are typical for their age. The effective support from adults ensures that children develop the necessary learning skills so they progress well. This results in the majority of children achieving a good level of development by the time they reach the end of their Reception Year and being well prepared for the challenges of key stage 1. In order to strengthen provision in the early years further, you have identified appropriate actions, such as improving the outside area so that it fully supports all the areas of learning.

Pupils continue to do well through key stage 1. The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics (letters and the sounds they make) screening check has exceeded the national figure for at least the last three years. By the end of Year 2, the percentage of pupils working at the expected level for their age and those working above this level, compares very well with national averages.

Outcomes at the end of Year 6 for reading, writing and mathematics have been above average in most years since the last inspection. In 2017, however, pupils did not make as much progress in reading and writing as they have done historically. You have implemented actions to remedy this and, although there is some evidence that progress in these subjects is improving, you acknowledge that there is still more to do to ensure that more pupils attain the higher standards of which they are capable.

You have addressed the areas for development from the previous inspection well. Governors are now involved in a range of monitoring activities, including learning walks and discussions with pupils. You provide them with comprehensive information about the progress pupils make and how the school is meeting its improvement priorities. As a result, governors are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They carry out their roles well, providing effective challenge and support.

You have also improved the way you track and monitor the pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This enables you to quickly identify areas in which the pupils are not performing as highly as you expect them to. You make appropriate improvements to the curriculum to address these issues. For example, you identified that some pupils lacked inference and deduction skills in reading. In response, you strengthened the teaching of reading. This included providing training for teachers to develop these important teaching skills. As a result, more pupils are now attaining higher reading standards across the school. Leaders now need to ensure that the information gathered is used more effectively to measure the impact of actions taken, for example to improve the progress of target groups and individual pupils.

You have ensured that pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum, which is enhanced by exciting enrichment opportunities. These include half-termly curriculum focus weeks and your 'Pupil Charter'. This ensures that all pupils enjoy a range of personal achievement experiences throughout their primary education. For example, all pupils complete a course in forest school education, have the opportunity to see a live theatre performance and visit exciting places of interest. The development of pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural understanding is an important part of the curriculum.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are a strength. Through the school's 'Our Wider Learning' initiative (OWL), you provide opportunities for pupils to learn about mental health and well-being. This includes taking opportunities to be calm, peaceful and quiet. Through your forest school programme and pupils taking part in lessons outdoors, you ensure that pupils spend as much time as possible outdoors, engaging with their environment. In addition, you have strengthened provision for physical education by ensuring that pupils have access to a wide range of sporting activities in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and the school website contains the required information. The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. Appropriate procedures are followed during the recruitment of staff. The checks on staff's suitability to work with children are thorough and detailed. You have established a strong safeguarding culture, and staff and governors have undertaken appropriate, up-to-date training. All staff and governors are knowledgeable about the procedures for keeping children safe and recognise that they have a collective responsibility to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for.

Pupils said they feel safe in school. Parents and carers agree. The school's designated safeguarding lead and deputy safeguarding leads work together as a highly effective team to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Support and advice from external agencies are sought where necessary and referrals are made in a timely way.

Pupils take part in a wide range of activities aimed at providing them with the knowledge to enable them to keep safe from a range of potential dangers. These activities include online safety week when pupils learn how to stay safe when using the internet, NSPCC workshops and sessions on water and road safety.

Inspection findings

- You use performance management very effectively to hold teachers to account for the progress made by pupils. Through careful monitoring of teaching and learning, you and your leadership team identify appropriate staff training. You link this to the whole-school improvement plan. Performance management targets are aspirational and clearly linked to pupil progress. This results in a comprehensive system of school improvement planning and effective support for teachers to continue to develop. The existing expertise among staff is shared to good effect to ensure that all staff benefit and become skilled practitioners.
- Attendance is high and has remained so for several years. You promote good attendance through newsletters to parents and rewards for pupils. You take prompt action to support families when their children's attendance begins to fall. This results in very low levels of persistent absence.
- You have high expectations for pupils. You set aspirational targets for them to achieve and use your progress tracking system well to identify pupils at risk of falling behind or who need additional support to achieve their targets. Effective interventions and

support from teaching assistants ensure that pupils catch up well and get back on track quickly. As a result of this effective support, pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils, and those pupils who were previously lower-attaining pupils, make very strong progress.

- In 2017, progress for pupils of middle and higher prior attainment, although in line with the national figure, was weaker than before, particularly in reading and writing. The percentage of pupils of middle prior attainment working at greater depth in reading and writing, or at the higher standard in mathematics, was below average. Although you recognise this and have taken steps to accelerate the progress of these pupils, you are not yet able to demonstrate a measurable impact on their outcomes. This continues to be an area for development.
- In 2017, the percentage of pupils attaining the expected and higher standard in EGPS was below the national average. On further analysis, you identified that this was actually a weak area across key stage 2. As a result, leaders implemented a series of actions to address this weakness. These included setting new EGPS expectations for each year group, putting in additional spelling sessions, enlisting the support of parents to help pupils at home and carefully tracking the pupils' progress. You also strengthened the teaching of phonics in Reception and key stage 1 by devising your own 'Fisher Phonics' scheme.
- Current school assessment information for EGPS shows that in all year groups at least 80% of pupils are now working at the expected level for their age, and at least 20% in each year group are working at greater depth. In Years 5 and 6, the percentage of pupils working at greater depth in this area of English is 40 and 34 respectively. This is a significant improvement on the previous year's results.
- During the inspection, observations of teaching and learning were carried out in four out of the seven year groups. The pupils we saw demonstrated positive attitudes and enjoyment in learning. In Reception, children were confident to share their phonic knowledge and accurately identified the sounds made by letters. They listened attentively and engaged well. Pupils in Year 2 enjoyed learning about fractions and, in Year 4, pupils made the most of the opportunity to use the outside environment to look for signs of spring to use in their poetry writing. Year 4 pupils could confidently explain the difference between similes and metaphors and gave some lovely examples of each. In Year 6, pupils were practising their division skills by completing long division problems, demonstrating resilience and a determination to succeed.
- We also looked at a range of mathematics and writing books in each of these classes. We agreed that the level of challenge, particularly in mathematics was not consistently high enough, particularly for middle- and higher-attaining pupils. We also agreed that the learning we observed was not challenging enough for some pupils. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils do make progress over time. However, as there is evidence that some pupils are not moved on quickly enough in their learning, particularly in mathematics, you acknowledge that progress could be stronger for a number of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently challenge pupils, particularly middle and higher attainers, so that all pupils fulfil their potential and more work at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics
- leaders use assessment information more effectively to ensure that actions taken to accelerate pupils' progress are having the desired impact.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Janet Satchwell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with senior leaders to review the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans. We agreed several lines of enquiry to check whether the school is maintaining a good standard of education.

We conducted a learning walk through the school during which we reviewed work in pupils' books, spoke to pupils and observed learning. I spoke to pupils from Years 3, 4 and 6 and listened to them read. I had a meeting with leaders to discuss assessment and attendance information. I met with representatives from the school's governing body.

A range of safeguarding checks was carried out including a review of the school's single central record and the steps followed when recruiting new members of staff. I had a meeting with the designated safeguarding leads to discuss work with external agencies and ways in which the school supports vulnerable children and their families.

I scrutinised a wide range of documents including: the school's website; governing body minutes; behaviour and bullying logs; the school's self-evaluation; school improvement priorities; training records and child protection files.

I reviewed the 22 responses to Parent View, and 12 parents' free text responses. I considered 12 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey.