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Mrs R Vayro
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Vayro

Short inspection of St Ambrose RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 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. You lead with strength and determination, demonstrating a clear vision which is shared by all staff. You note that everyone is working together for the greater good of the pupils. This was very apparent during the inspection. Your school's ethos shines out in all that you do. You also note that there is a relentless effort to maintain strong systems, roles and responsibilities. As a result of your drive for improvement, leaders are now offering support and training to other schools in the local area.

Governors share your high expectations and reflect your clear Christian ethos. They know the school well and work with you to ensure that pupils receive a broad and balanced education. There is a strong focus on the spiritual, moral, social and emotional aspects of learning, together with the academic. Governors understand the areas where further development is required in school and offer appropriate challenge and support.

You enable pupils to take a leadership role in many aspects of school life. For example, they helped to design the new school uniform and the logo. Your school chapel is a place of calm and retreat. Pupils who are members of your chaplaincy group contributed to the design of this area and they are very proud to wear the distinctive purple sweater which identifies their role. Pupils are grateful for the many opportunities that you provide for them to take part in the school's decision-making process.

You have worked strategically to enhance the school's indoor and outdoor spaces. These are now spacious, attractive and used to full effect to engage and celebrate the achievements of pupils. The entrance area displays the many awards that the school has received. Classroom displays celebrate the work of pupils and support their learning. Your 'Growing in Faith Together' outdoor area gives pupils many opportunities to enhance their learning across the curriculum and promote their physical, emotional and spiritual development. Your local authority quality assurance partner notes that the school has been transformed under your leadership.

In the previous inspection, the inspector reported that teachers should ensure the consistency of challenge, especially for the most able, so that they reach the highest levels in their learning. You ensure that teachers and teaching assistants receive training to enable them to challenge pupils in their learning. This has been successful. Your most recent published performance information for pupils in key stage 2 shows that the most able pupils are achieving at a level which is broadly in line with other pupils nationally in writing and mathematics.

The inspectors also noted that improvements should be made to the presentation of pupils' work and that pupils should be given opportunities to develop their vocabulary further. Leaders and teachers have worked hard to improve the consistency of the presentation of pupils' work throughout the school through a structured approach to the teaching of handwriting. Teachers plan many opportunities for writing which, together with high-quality reading resources, enhance vocabulary development. My observation of pupils' work evidences success in this area with handwriting, presentation and vocabulary development being of a good overall standard.

You have also introduced a new system for assessment which is being used to track the progress of pupils effectively. Teachers now collect performance information for all pupils across the curriculum and present it to leaders in a concise fashion. As a result, teachers are in a strong position to plan effective teaching. This has ensured improvements in many areas of the curriculum, including writing and mathematics. The assessment system also supports leaders in highlighting areas where further actions are required to develop pupils' attainment.

We discussed areas where further work is required to support school improvement. Much work has been done to improve pupils' attendance, but persistent absence levels remain stubbornly high and require further attention by leaders. Additionally, the work that teachers and leaders have done to improve the performance in reading of lower- and middle-ability pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, now requires further development. This is to ensure that more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, reach the higher levels in reading at key stage 1 and key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils say that they feel safe and this view is shared by almost all of the parents

and carers who responded to Ofsted's parental questionnaire Parent View. The Christian ethos is evident in the way in which teachers work with pupils and the way pupils support each other. One parent, reflecting the views of the majority, noted that, 'All the staff are approachable and the school has a lovely friendly atmosphere.'

Your school site is safe and secure and visitors are checked on entry and provided with detailed information on the school's procedures to keep pupils safe. Staff members are trained thoroughly and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to child protection. Clear procedures are in place to protect the most vulnerable pupils. Your pupils who have the role of 'E-Cadets' have received training on e-safety and take great pride in guiding other pupils to stay safe online.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, I shared with you a number of key lines of enquiry. The first considered how effective measures put in place to reduce persistent absence have been. Leaders are pro-active in addressing this issue. Letters are sent out to parents reminding them about the school's expectations and explaining the effect on their children of long-term absence. Follow-up calls are made to families and, where appropriate, visits are made to homes to offer appropriate support. You are uncompromising in your drive to reduce absence and take strong measures to deal with absence that is unauthorised. Leaders and teachers ensure that a variety of incentives and rewards are in place to encourage pupils to attend school regularly. While some progress has been made with groups of pupils, persistent absence remains stubbornly above the national average and requires further attention by leaders.
- The next area we examined was the performance of disadvantaged pupils, especially those who are most able. You are aware that, while their progress is strong, the attainment of this group of pupils in reading and writing is below that seen nationally in published tests at the end of key stage 2. Leaders are working hard to analyse the needs of disadvantaged pupils, and additional funding received for this group of pupils is spent in an effective manner. As a consequence, your school's current performance information shows that there is an improving trend, with the performance of disadvantaged pupils moving towards that of other pupils in the school in most areas. This is most notable in key stage 1, where pupils have benefited from an earlier age from your new systems.
- You have worked closely with leaders and other staff to improve the provision for children in early years. You are aware that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year has been below that seen nationally for at least the past two years. Your entry data shows that children arrive in Reception with skills which are well below those typical for their age. From this low starting point, children make strong progress. This is because you have introduced a detailed assessment system which tracks progress effectively. There has been a clear focus in early years on developing reading, writing and mathematics. A broad range of opportunities are available to develop

children's skills across the curriculum, and the work they produce in their books is of a high standard. As a result of this focused approach, the number of children reaching a good level of development is increasing and some current children are exceeding the expected standard.

- Finally, we looked at the impact of leaders' efforts to increase the number of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading in key stages 1 and 2. Leaders have created action plans to ensure that areas identified as requiring further support in reading are addressed. You have developed a shared and well-understood method of teaching phonics. This is now introduced in early years and is having a strong impact on performance. Leaders ensure that pupils move from phonics learning to a more detailed understanding of literacy and language. You are justly proud of the fact that your staff now provide training to other schools on teaching phonics.
- Leaders ensure that reading has a very high profile within the school, with parents being offered training via workshops so that they can more ably support their children at home. Clear procedures are in place to support staff in teaching reading. Improved assessment is beginning to ensure that the performance of all groups in this subject is closely monitored, with support being put in place for pupils who fall behind the targets.
- Your school has a language-rich environment. High-quality literature is available for pupils to read. Leaders spend a large amount of money to ensure that books are available to excite and engage all pupils. Your website gives pupils the opportunity to respond to books that they have read. This is enjoyed by the pupils and is increasing their enjoyment of reading. Leaders have begun to develop the curriculum to ensure that more pupils are able to reach the higher levels. We agreed that work undertaken to develop further the most able readers, including those who are disadvantaged, requires further time to be embedded. This will ensure that all staff are very clear on the skills required for pupils to achieve at the higher levels in the future.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- persistent absence is reduced to reflect levels seen nationally
- the changes to improve reading are embedded to ensure that the number of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, reaching the higher levels in reading at key stages 1 and 2 increases to reflect rates seen nationally.

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

for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gill Pritchard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. I also met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with the designated safeguarding leader, the attendance officer and the business manager. I met with phase leaders to discuss pupils' current performance in school. I also spoke with the school's local authority quality assurance officer. I had a formal discussion with a group of pupils and met with your school administrator.

Accompanied by you, I visited all year groups in the school and looked at outdoor provision. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised examples of pupils' work and reviewed documents, including your record of checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children. I also examined the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan, external reports and assessment information. I took account of the 49 responses to Parent View Ofsted's online questionnaire, 13 responses from the staff survey and 58 responses from the pupil survey. I also considered information posted on the school's website.