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Mrs Yates
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Yates

Short inspection of St Aidan's Catholic 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher you have galvanised the staff, pupils and parents and given the school a new sense of direction. You are continually looking for ways to improve. For example, you place strong emphasis on professional development for all staff, ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills to drive forward improvements at a pace. In addition, you have remodelled the outdoor area for early years to provide an exciting environment with a wealth of activities to enhance all areas of children's learning.

The strong faith element of your school runs deeply through all aspects of its work. There is a clear focus from leaders on nurturing the whole child. You do this effectively through the strong supportive relationships you and your staff have built with pupils and their families. Pupils, staff and parents have confidence and trust in the leadership of this school.

There is strong teamwork among the staff, and through your support and encouragement they feel empowered to develop their roles in education. Staff appreciate your inclusive style of leadership and are keen to develop their middle leader roles further. Morale at this school is high. You promote the well-being of staff to ensure that they have a good work/life balance.

As we toured the school we observed good behaviour. Pupils show respect and get on well together. They told me about the wide range of trips and out-of-school activities you provide to broaden their experiences and ignite their passion for

learning. Pupils contribute to decision-making within the school, for example as elected members of the school council. Older pupils told me how they run clubs for the enjoyment of others in the school. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying and the distress it can cause. They say that bullying is rare and, if it does occur, staff deal with it swiftly. Pupils feel safe in school and are happy to disclose any worries or concerns to a member of staff.

Relationships with parents are strong; they believe their children are safe and make good progress. They find the staff approachable and believe that the school is well managed. For example, a comment written by one parent said, 'I would highly recommend St Aidan's to any parent.'

Your self-evaluation is accurate and honest. You recognise the value of the school development plan in helping you to monitor the progress that the school is making towards achieving its targets. However, we both agree that it is not as precise as it could be. You also recognise outcomes in phonics and at the end of key stage 1 are not as strong as they could be and that the role of middle leaders of subjects such as history and geography needs further development. As a result, you have put in place a range of strategies that are addressing these areas.

At the last inspection you were asked to improve the quality of teaching, particularly in writing, and to provide regular writing opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in English and other subjects. You are taking action to address this by developing a clear sequence for the teaching of writing, providing additional training for staff and more closely tracking pupils' progress and attainment. As a result, there have been improvements in writing, including in pupils' spelling, which has also been a part of this process. Pupils' books show good progress over time and your latest assessment information shows an increase in the proportion of pupils on track to meet end-of-year expectations in each year.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is a priority at this school. You and your governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders with designated responsibilities for safeguarding are knowledgeable and active in ensuring a culture of vigilance in relation to safeguarding. Training is up to date for all adults who work in school. The school site is safe and secure. Visitors' credentials are closely checked.

Staff are aware of the different types of abuse and the signs to look for. They know how to apply the school's safeguarding policies and make quick referrals should they have concerns about pupils' well-being. Referrals are followed up quickly by safeguarding leaders. The case files I reviewed showed that the school seeks appropriate, timely support for families in challenging circumstances.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The school's curriculum effectively teaches pupils how to keep safe in a range of contexts. They speak with confidence about the risks of using the internet and online safety.

Inspection findings

- In recent years, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Years 1 and 2 was below the national average. You did not shy away from this challenge. A more structured approach to the teaching of phonics was introduced. You tightened procedures for monitoring the progress that pupils make and, as a result, outcomes for phonics are improving for children in Years 1 and 2. We observed the skills of teachers and teaching assistants in supporting pupils of different abilities to develop their phonics knowledge. The pupils we observed demonstrated confidence and clear strategies they had learned to enable them to read new words. You recognise that the challenge for the school now is to ensure that these improving outcomes are securely embedded year on year.
- Published data in 2016 and 2017 showed that outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 needed to be improved, particularly for most-able pupils and disadvantaged pupils. The school has taken swift action to improve this with a range of interventions and teaching strategies. The school's assessment information shows that outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are improving. However, from looking at pupils' books, it is evident that activities do not always challenge pupils, particularly those who learn more quickly. For example, boxes in which pupils write their answers often limit how much they can write. You recognise there is work still to be done to ensure that all pupils make the progress that they are capable of and that these improving outcomes are sustained to the end of the academic year and beyond.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils has been used well to provide additional support for this group, including for the most able disadvantaged pupils. The school assessment information shows that outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are improving for this group of pupils, with a greater proportion on track to reach the higher standard in each subject than in recent years. Governors know how the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent and how this has an impact on the progress of this group of pupils.
- You are passionate about ensuring that your pupils receive a rich curriculum and you have made this a priority for development. It is evident from displays around school and pupils' books that a broad and balanced curriculum is being taught in subjects such as history, geography, science and art. Your middle leaders are passionate about their subject and you have enabled them to develop their skills in leading their subject. As a result, pupils are making good progress across the curriculum in these areas. However, we both agree that the role of middle leaders is not yet fully embedded and there is further work to be done in developing their role to ensure that they have an impact on standards in their subject.
- The governing body has undergone considerable change in membership since the previous inspection. The current governors play a key role in supporting the work of the school. They are ambitious for the school to succeed. They speak passionately about the ethos of the school. They attend a range of appropriate training and are knowledgeable and well equipped to support the school's work effectively. Governors' minutes demonstrate the relevant and searching questions

they ask at meetings about all aspects of school performance. They act as critical friends and offer good levels of support and challenge in equal measure.

- You recognise the value of the school development plan in helping you to monitor the progress that the school is making towards achieving its targets. However, you recognise that it is not as precise as it could be. Because it does not have measurable success criteria, governors are not able to monitor the effectiveness of key strategies closely enough.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school improvement plan is tightly focused and has clear, measurable success criteria, enabling governors to monitor progress towards key targets
- the roles of middle leaders of subjects such as history and geography are further developed so they have a greater impact on teaching, learning and assessment
- recent initiatives to improve phonics and outcomes in key stage 1 are sustained over time.

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

Yours sincerely

Aleksandra Hartshorne
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and a group of staff. I met with four governors and spoke with your local authority adviser. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to readers. You and I made visits to lessons in early years and key stage 1 to observe the teaching of phonics. I also examined a range of pupils' work.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, assessment information and governors' minutes. Additionally, I scrutinised safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with pupils.

I took account of 40 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and many additional free-text comments. I also reviewed 21 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 16 responses to the pupil survey.