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Mrs Diana Pearce
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Dear Mrs Pearce

Short inspection of St Francis Xavier's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 June 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school is underpinned by a strong Catholic ethos. The mission to: 'Share God's love with one another. Follow your dreams. Excel in citizenship' is well understood by all members of the school community and is visibly lived out in the day-to-day life of the school. As a result, pupils thrive in a caring environment that supports them well, both academically and pastorally.

You have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that still need further development. You have driven improvements with relentless energy and a clear sense of purpose. Outcomes for pupils have improved year on year and this trajectory is set to continue in 2018. You have built a team that is constantly striving for excellence. They know their contribution to the success of the school is acknowledged and valued. High-quality training and professional development have ensured that there is an agreed approach to teaching and learning, which is delivered absolutely consistently in every class. For example,

highly effective questioning is a common feature in lessons. Teachers use this strategy to make pupils explain and justify their thinking, which challenges pupils and deepens learning.

Leaders and teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. There is no room for any pupil to be a passive learner. Teachers use their very strong subject knowledge to teach well-structured and well-paced lessons effectively that strike a healthy balance between consolidating and deepening pupils' understanding. Consequently, pupils make strong and sustained progress over time.

Not surprisingly, pupils, staff and parents hold entirely positive views about the school. Parents and carers are highly appreciative of the approachability of all staff. They feel that they can raise any concerns that they may have and are listened to. Swift and appropriate action is then taken. All the parents who participated in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said they would recommend the school to other parents. One parent echoed the view of many when she said: 'I could not ask for a more loving and caring team. My children have always loved school and make good progress. The headteacher and staff have a genuine care for the children and put them first at all times.'

Governors are proud of the school. They are well informed by you and other staff with leadership responsibility. They regularly visit the school and check what is reported to them. They use their skills effectively to provide support and challenge for school leaders.

You and the staff are mindful not to focus excessively on English and mathematics. The curriculum is wide and interesting and as a result, pupils say that they enjoy learning. Pupils benefit from visitors and trips to enhance the learning experience. However, given the restricted experiences some pupils have, providing pupils with opportunities beyond their normal experience continues to be important in order to ensure that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that the most able pupils are always given suitably challenging work in mathematics. You have addressed this by ensuring that teaching requires pupils to not only apply skills but reason, explain and justify. However, outcomes for pupils in mathematics in 2017 were not as high as they were in reading and writing and the embedding of the new approach to teaching mathematics continues to be a focus for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that there is an effective safeguarding culture and have implemented a comprehensive range of policies and procedures, which are fit for purpose. All staff have received appropriate training and are fully up to date with recent guidance. Records of safeguarding concerns are appropriately detailed. Any concerns are followed up thoroughly and action is recorded. The safeguarding governor is proactive in auditing provision and holding leaders to account.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and say that it is a safe place, where poor behaviour and bullying are rare. Pupils have confidence in the staff to resolve any worries they may have. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, particularly when they are using the internet. They are fully aware of the dangers of sharing personal information when using computers or mobile telephones.

Inspection findings

- Year on year, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has risen, from being below national averages in 2015 to being well above in 2017. I looked at whether this improvement was being sustained. I observed phonics teaching and saw pupils enjoying practising their phonics because the teacher made the activities fun and exciting. You have recently undertaken the 2018 phonics check and results show that the high outcomes from 2017 have been sustained.
- I also focused attention on writing. This was because it has been an area for development for the school. Staff have received a significant amount of training and a new whole-school approach has been developed. This has increased teachers' subject knowledge of sentence structure and grammatical techniques.
- Pupils' writing skills are developed extremely well across subjects and pupils are able to write extensively. Pupils use an impressive range of vocabulary because teachers encourage them to experiment with less common words. Pupils were observed discussing accurately the shades of meaning in synonyms. For example, in one class pupils were considering synonyms for sad and ranking them for strength of emotion. They used words such as 'forlorn', 'crestfallen', 'dejected' and 'despondent'. It is clear that pupils have the skill to select vocabulary choices that have a powerful effect on the reader. This is repeatedly evident in their workbooks.
- We agreed that a further focus for the inspection would be the quality of teaching in mathematics. Leaders have worked to ensure that there is a consistent approach in mathematics lessons across the school. Pupils are taught how to think deeply and explain their thinking. An internal analysis of pupils' attainment in mathematics for the end of 2018 indicates that outcomes will be more in line with those in reading and writing. However, to ensure that this improvement is sustained, improving teaching in mathematics should continue to be a focus for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a continued focus on developing the deeper thinking skills of reasoning in mathematics and that the layers of conceptual understanding are developed over time
- pupils are supported and encouraged to develop their understanding of the world, beyond their day-to-day experience.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other members of school staff and members of the governing body. I also spoke on the telephone to the local authority school improvement adviser. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look in their books. I looked at an extensive range of current books from each year group. I also spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I took into account the views of 36 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I looked at a range of documentation including information about safeguarding and attendance. I scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.