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Mrs Hayley Francis
Headteacher
St Joseph's RC Primary School
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Dear Mrs Francis

Short inspection of St Joseph's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Following the last inspection, outcomes in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 immediately fell into rapid decline and were very low in 2016, especially in writing. However, on your appointment in September 2016, you made writing, which was highlighted as a key issue at the last inspection, your number one priority throughout the school. You and your senior leaders have overseen a remarkable improvement in writing outcomes. Provisional results for Year 6 tests and assessments in 2018 are very high. These outcomes show the impact of the strong leadership shown by you and your senior colleagues.

You have also transformed the outdoor learning environment in the Nursery and Reception classes, the other key issue for improvement from the last inspection. Photographs of the state of the outdoor environment in 2016 when compared to the current provision show the positive impact of what you have achieved. Outcomes at the end of Reception are now on a sharp rising trend and were very high in 2018, when all children achieved a good level of development.

Parents responding to Parent View free-text were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of your leadership. One parent, summarising the view of others, said, 'The school continues to improve from when the new headteacher came in.'

The joint governing body has overhauled the leadership structure of the soft federation made up of St Joseph's and another school. They have ensured that there is now a full-time headteacher based at the school, with a committee of governors focussing exclusively on St Joseph's. This new arrangement has increased the scrutiny and accountability of the work of senior leaders.

You have ensured that attendance is now on a rising trend and above the national average by clamping down on authorised absence for holidays during term time. No parents responding to the survey expressed any concern about this. Their views were summed up by one parent who said the approach is 'firm but fair'.

You recognise that mathematics remains a key priority for the school as, to date, outcomes at the end of key stage 2 have not improved quickly enough. New leaders in mathematics have not had sufficient time to have an impact, especially at key stage 2. You have identified the need to increase the proportion of pupils achieving a high standard in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Also, in the last two years no pupils have left Reception having exceeded the early learning goals across all the prime areas of learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

As designated safeguarding lead, you have ensured that leaders and all staff are fully up to date with the Department for Education's latest guidance. The school's child protection policy has been updated very promptly to take account of recent changes. You have strengthened safeguarding procedures in the school. The culture is one of vigilance and reporting any 'niggle', however small. Staff are well trained to carry out their responsibilities and know what to do if they have any concerns.

Pupils reported unanimously that they feel very safe and secure in school. They also said they have been taught well to keep themselves safe out of school, for example when using social media. Parents also agreed that the school keeps their children safe. One parent's comment, which was typical of the texts received, stated that the school staff are all very knowledgeable with safeguarding and keep their son safe.

Governors are secure in their understanding about their safeguarding responsibilities. They now have a link safeguarding governor specifically for St Joseph's to ensure that governors hold leaders rigorously to account.

Inspection findings

- Improving outcomes in writing at the end of key stage 2 was your key priority when you were appointed in September 2016. In the 2016 Year 6 tests and assessments, pupils' progress in writing from the end of key stage 1 had been in the lowest 1% for all schools nationally. Only two years later, provisional outcomes in 2018 show that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in writing was above the national average for all pupils in 2017. The proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in writing, over 45%, was well above the previous year's national average. You have achieved this by the introduction

of extended writing across the curriculum which is much appreciated by pupils and parents. You have engaged parents well through writing workshops and extended opportunities for writing in other subjects such as science and religious education. You have tackled previous weak teaching in writing, which has either led to improvements or staffing changes.

- The two separate outdoor environments for the Nursery and Reception classes are stunning. In Reception, a large and secure area enables pupils to experience the natural environment through growing plants and vegetables such as carrots and lettuce, and by exploring the woodland. There are dedicated curriculum areas, including for numeracy. The children I spoke to are very proud of their facilities. Similarly, in Nursery there are now activities for mark marking and developing literacy in the smaller outside area. Opportunities for numeracy outside in Nursery are more limited, however.
- You have also overseen an improvement in attendance. The rates of absence and persistent absence had increased from 2015 to 2016 to be further above the national average. The level of attendance improved in 2017, although it was still below average. The latest provisional figures for the last academic year up to July 2018 indicate that both absence and persistent absence were now below the 2016/17 national averages. This represents a two-year improving trend for both. You have achieved this improvement by challenging the culture so that parents are no longer granted authorised absence to take holidays in term time. You have also secured the services of an education welfare officer to follow up unexplained absences promptly and work closely with families of persistent absentees.
- Outcomes for pupils in mathematics by the end of key stage 1 are consistently above the national average. Similarly, the proportion of children leaving Reception who exceeded the early learning goals in mathematics was very high in 2018. Younger pupils in key stage 2 made good progress in mathematics during the last academic year. Pupils reported that they enjoy mathematics. One pupil said, 'Maths is the best thing about the school because we get lots of hard questions.' They enjoy the extra help and support they get with their work in mathematics. Leaders are outward-looking and engage well with external partners, including the local authority and locally identified outstanding schools to improve outcomes in mathematics.
- You have rightly identified that there is more to do to improve outcomes for older pupils in mathematics at key stage 2. The school has been slow to introduce mathematics mastery into its teaching of the subject in key stage 2, only starting from September 2018. There has been a very recent change in leadership of mathematics in key stage 2 and the overall leadership of mathematics has not been in place long enough for the changes to have had sufficient impact.
- Provisional results show that most-able pupils did well in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2018, and in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1. Current pupils experience more challenging work in music, science and religious education. However, very few have achieved a high standard in mathematics in Year 6. Plans to secure improvements for most-able mathematicians are at an early stage of development. Although most-able

children did well in mathematics by the end of Reception, no child exceeded a good level of development across all the prime areas of learning and in the combined specific areas of literacy and mathematics in 2017 or 2018.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- older pupils in key stage 2 make more rapid progress in mathematics so that a larger proportion of most-able pupils achieve a high standard by the end of Year 6
- more children exceed the early learning goals in all the prime areas of learning and in the specific areas of literacy and mathematics by the end of Reception.

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

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior and middle leaders, and other members of the teaching staff. I also met with two members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority. I also spoke by telephone to the school's external improvement partner.

I carried out a learning walk of parts of five lessons, jointly with you and your deputy headteacher, which included scrutinising pupils' books and talking to pupils.

I spoke to a group of pupils from key stages 1 and 2.

I took account of 29 responses to Parent View's free-text facility and 47 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil survey or the staff survey.

I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, pupil performance information, attendance information, and school policy documents as well as safeguarding and child protection records. I also checked the school's website.