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Mrs Andrea Worthington
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Dear Mrs Worthington

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 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 July 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.

Since the last inspection, standards for reading, writing and mathematics have declined. Pupils' attainment in these subjects has been below the national average at key stage 2 for the past two years. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has also remained below the national average. Despite improvements in 2018, weak phonic knowledge hinders the progress pupils make in both reading and writing. Outcomes for pupils in key stage 1 have declined and are below the national average now. Leaders were asked to improve pupils' achievements in mathematics and provide opportunities for Reception and Year 1 pupils to explore mathematics outdoors. They have not responded quickly enough in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Since your recent appointment, you have put much-needed changes in place. Your swift actions have halted the decline in standards across the school. You have worked with other leaders and staff to identify accurately key priorities for improvement. Training for staff has helped them to support pupils' learning more effectively. Teachers value the opportunities they have been given to benefit from the expertise and ideas from colleagues, including colleagues from other schools. Leaders have made changes to the way that mathematics and phonics is taught. You have made organisational changes to the way that pupils who have special

educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported. You are developing a culture of open and professional dialogue between all key stakeholders. Teachers share your determination to make the rapid improvements required. As a result, pupils are beginning to make faster rates of progress, including pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. However, time is needed to embed these improvements and ensure consistency across the school.

You have established a productive and transparent relationship with governors. Recent training helps governors to carry out their roles and responsibilities well. Governors check information they receive from leaders by visiting the school and talking to pupils about their work. Governors now use their skills, knowledge and expertise to hold leaders to account. They have increased their expectations and ensure that the actions that leaders take make a positive difference to outcomes for pupils. However, the historically poor quality of teaching in some classes means that some pupils have gaps in their learning, particularly in English and mathematics. It is too soon to measure the impact of the changes you have made as many of the strategies in place are too recent to have influenced outcomes for all pupils.

Pupils are well mannered, polite and confident. The positive relationships fostered by the adults in school contribute to pupils' positive behaviour and attitude towards learning. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to visit other places, for example older pupils talked to me enthusiastically about their recent visit to London. Pupils appreciate the wide variety of clubs and activities on offer, including instrumental lessons, arts and craft club and rugby. They are particularly proud of winning the local football championship. Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously as committee members and sports leaders. They are proud of their school and value their school motto, 'Truly, friendly, caring', because it exemplifies how they feel about St Joseph's.

Most parents and carers spoken to during the inspection, and those who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, commented positively on the school. A small proportion of parents expressed their concerns about the impact of recent changes at the school. However, most parents spoke of how happy their children are in school and the positive impact of the changes you have put in place. Parents appreciate the calm and welcoming atmosphere within the school. Parents of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities spoke highly of the support and guidance they receive from you and your staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Procedures are clearly understood by staff. High-quality training and weekly updates enable staff to identify quickly any vulnerable pupils and put help in place. Leaders work very effectively with other agencies and charities to ensure that pupils and families receive appropriate guidance and support.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They learn how to keep themselves safe

through a variety of activities, including online safety and 'stranger danger' talks. They know staff care about them and say that there is an adult in school they can talk with should they have concerns or worries. Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take. They say that there is no bullying in school and are confident that teachers would deal quickly with any incidents of bullying, should they occur.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection I followed up several key lines of enquiry. The first was around attendance. I wanted to know what actions had been taken to improve the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent from school. Attendance overall is broadly in line with the national average. Leaders are vigilant in following up pupils who are absent from school. Procedures are in place to ensure that pupils who are persistently absent from school are safe. A small proportion of pupils do not arrive punctually at school. Staff meet with parents and work with families to establish routines for the start of the day. Certificates to reward good attendance are having a positive impact on improving attendance. Consequently, the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school is decreasing.
- Next, I looked at how well phonics is taught in school. Following a review, leaders have made changes in the way that phonics is taught. Leaders have provided training for staff. Teachers' improved subject knowledge has a positive impact on the progress that pupils make. Phonics is now taught systematically and consistently from Reception. Teachers use phonics assessment information to identify gaps in pupils' learning and provide the help that they need to catch up quickly. The provisional assessment information for 2018 indicates that the proportion of Year 1 pupils who reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check was above the national average. Pupils' work shows that they are beginning use their phonic skills and knowledge better to help them in their writing and reading. However, the impact of these improvements on pupils' knowledge and skills in reading and writing has not been swift enough for some pupils. Outcomes in reading and writing at the end of key stage 1 remain below the national average.
- My third line of enquiry was whether more children were reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception. Most children have skills and knowledge typical for their age when they start school. Well-thought-through activities during visits in the summer term ensure that children settle quickly into the routines when they start at the school. Staff work with parents so that they can help their child to learn at home. Parents contribute regularly to the online assessment information that leaders gather. Staff training ensures that they have a good understanding of how young children learn. This enables them to use assessment information effectively to identify the next steps in children's learning. Leaders work with other colleagues to check the accuracy of their judgements. Provisional assessment information for 2018 indicates that a greater proportion of children than previously reached a good level of development and are ready for Year 1.

- Leaders have reorganised the learning areas within the school for younger pupils. They have established a bright and welcoming indoor environment in the new classroom for Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. Teachers ensure that the individual learning needs of pupils of different ages are met effectively as they learn together. However, there is much to do to unlock the potential of the outdoor area and ensure that it complements the quality of the indoor provision, particularly for the Reception children. Leaders and staff work with other schools to share their expertise and ideas of how to develop the provision further. It is too soon to measure the impact of these improvements on outcomes for pupils.
- I was interested to see what you had done to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics. Although provisional assessment information indicates that pupils' outcomes in reading and writing show signs of improving in 2018, outcomes in mathematics lags behind. Leaders have carried out a detailed analysis of assessment information and checks on the quality of pupils' work. This information highlighted gaps in pupils' knowledge and inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. You took decisive action to change the way that mathematics is taught. Training has helped staff to improve their teaching and develop their confidence. Teachers now use assessment effectively to identify pupils who are struggling. They use questions skilfully to encourage pupils to explain their reasoning and develop their ideas. Pupils are beginning to apply their knowledge and skills to problem-solving challenges. This comment is typical of what pupils told me: 'Thinking about the problems makes your brain jiggle but even when it's hard I love maths.' However, despite these improvements, outcomes for pupils remain below the national average in mathematics at both key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Finally, I looked at the effectiveness of the school's provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders provide training to ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to meet pupils' needs effectively. Contributions from parents and pupils enrich the quality of the assessment information leaders gather. Leaders work closely with other agencies, professionals and charities to ensure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have access to high-quality resources. Such pupils are making good progress from their individual starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent from school so that they attend school regularly and on time
- embed the improvements to the way phonics is taught, enabling pupils to apply their phonic knowledge accurately in their reading and writing and improve outcomes at the end of key stage 1
- develop the potential of the new outdoor area to enhance the provision for younger pupils

- build on the improvements in the way mathematics is taught, ensuring consistency and improving outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, other members of the leadership team and staff. I also spoke with four members of the governing body and had a conversation with a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms with you, where I had the opportunity to speak with pupils and look at their work. I met with a group of pupils formally during the day and I spoke with several parents at the start of the school day. I took account of five responses to the staff questionnaire. I also considered the 12 free-text comments and the 23 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. I scrutinised pupils' assessment information and a range of documentation, including the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding procedures and practices.