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Mrs Martine Gum
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gum

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 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 April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have injected renewed ambition into the direction of the school since your appointment in January 2018. While new to the role of headteacher, your knowledge of the school runs deep following your time as deputy headteacher. Consequently, your views of the school's strengths and areas for improvement are accurate.

St Joseph's is a welcoming and friendly school. There is a calm atmosphere for learning throughout. Pupils are proud of their school and treat each other and their teachers with respect. Pupils enjoy the many exciting and memorable opportunities that enrich the curriculum. These include musical and sporting activities as well as learning outside of the classroom. The school's strong Catholic ethos is prevalent throughout, and is reinforced in the interesting and attractive displays around school and the good links with the local church. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is developed well.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to analyse data and other information more effectively so that they could provide appropriate support for pupils when needed. You have introduced rigorous assessment procedures to track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils. You check this against information gathered through regular observations of teaching and reviews of pupils' work in books. This means that pupils who are not achieving as well as they should be are quickly identified and provided with extra support to enable them to catch up.

Leaders were also asked to improve teaching even further. You implemented some

significant changes to secure this position, including introducing a consistent approach to the teaching of reading, writing and spelling. You have raised expectations for the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. You and the governors have not shied away from making difficult decisions, and underperformance against these higher expectations has been challenged. Your actions to improve teaching have had a positive impact, most notably on provision in the early years and the progress that pupils make in reading and mathematics. Your school improvement plan correctly identifies that challenge for the most able pupils remains a key priority across the school.

Governors and the local authority recognise the impact that you have had on improving the school and they support your actions. Leaders are aware that a minority of staff, and a small number of parents and carers, are not fully convinced about the changes that have been put in place recently. In some respects, this is inevitable because of the pace and scale of the changes. However, communication about the reason for new plans and policies has not been fully effective in allaying the concerns of staff and parents.

Governors bring a range of appropriate skills and experience, including in finance, health and safety, and these make a positive contribution to the school. Governors are frequent visitors and receive timely information on the progress that pupils make. They evaluate their own performance and attend regular training to ensure that they stay abreast of local and national changes. At the start of the inspection, the school website did not contain all of the required information. Governors do not currently have systematic procedures for checking this or for reviewing and updating policies. Action was swift, and by the end of the inspection the website had been updated. Nonetheless, governors recognised that a new system was needed to regularly review school policies and the website to check that these meet requirements.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school provides a safe and caring environment for pupils. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Appropriate statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. Training is regular and keeps everyone up to date, including new staff. This means that staff know what to do should they identify any concerns.

At the start of the inspection, the school's whistle-blowing policy and most up-to-date safeguarding policy were not published on the school's website but were available in school. By the end of the inspection the website had been updated to include these policies.

Through the curriculum and in assemblies, pupils are taught to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They talk with confidence about the dangers posed by the internet and have good strategies for recognising and reporting problems. Pupils say that bullying is rare and quickly stopped. They are confident in seeking help from adults if they have a problem and know it will be resolved.

Parents agree that pupils are safe, as typified by the comment: 'From her very first day, my child has been made to feel safe, secure and, more importantly, loved by everyone at

St Joseph's.'

Inspection findings

- An agreed line of enquiry was to explore the impact of the changes to improve outcomes for children in the early years. The newly appointed early years leader is beginning to make a positive difference. Provision both indoors and outside has improved. Activities are designed to encourage children to learn, play and explore with greater independence. They excitedly engage in role-play, mark-making, physical and creative play. Children enjoy learning, often becoming absorbed in their tasks. For example, during the inspection, when using the library area, children used pictures, books and their own imagination to retell confidently the story of the Three Little Pigs.
- The school's own assessments show that approximately one third of children enter school with skills and abilities below those typically seen for their age. Overall, good teaching is helping them to learn quickly so that outcomes at the end of Reception are improving. However, a lower-than-average number of children reach a good level of development and very few exceed the early learning goals in reading, writing and mathematics. This is partly because opportunities are missed to extend or apply their knowledge. For example, children are given different implements to encourage pre-writing and mark-making, but activities do not challenge the most able to further apply their writing skills. This means that some of the most able children are not making the progress of which they are capable.
- An additional area of enquiry was to find out how effective leaders are in helping pupils in key stage 1, including those who are disadvantaged, to work at greater depth in reading and mathematics. In 2017 and 2018, the proportion that reached greater depth in these subjects was below the national averages. Your own evaluation found that for some pupils progress in reading was hampered because their early language skills were not well developed. You have made changes to strengthen the progress of all pupils. These changes include more help for younger pupils to enable them to gain a good understanding of phonics and to improve their reading comprehension skills. Staff training, additional adult support and new resources have also had a positive effect.
- Work in mathematics books shows that current pupils, including the most able, are increasingly using new strategies that strengthen their ability to apply their knowledge and understanding. They have more opportunities to develop their reasoning skills and apply them to solve mathematical problems. Inspection evidence and your own assessment information for current pupils show that they are making good progress in reading and mathematics. However, these strategies are at an early stage and you are rightly focused on deepening knowledge and understanding further to enable more pupils to work at greater depth.
- The small number of disadvantaged pupils in most year groups means that the data must be treated with caution. Despite this, you are not complacent. You have secured advice and training from leading practitioners to help design specific plans for individual pupils. You have put extra help in place to bridge gaps in learning and to improve key areas which impede progress, such as attendance and behaviour. Staff work very closely with parents to keep plans under regular review. This approach is working and is evident in the increase in attainment for individual pupils and a significant improvement in attendance. Disadvantaged pupils are well supported to help them

overcome barriers to their learning and, as a result, they make good progress.

- I wanted to find out why the progress pupils made in writing was slower than in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. I also wanted to see why so few of the older pupils reach the higher standard in writing compared to all pupils nationally. From observing in classes, talking with pupils and looking in their books, it is evident that the teaching of writing across the school is mainly consistent. As they move through the school, pupils become increasingly more confident and accurate when editing their work. Basic skills of handwriting, punctuation and spelling are developed well. The majority of pupils take pride in their written work, which is presented neatly. Pupils use their writing skills fluently and apply them in other subjects as well as English. However, in some classes, pupils are not encouraged to think of their own ideas, which limits their understanding of how to make writing more interesting. Opportunities for pupils to write at length or for different purposes are not consistent across the different classes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they continue to:

- deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding in reading and mathematics to support more of them to work at greater depth and to reach the higher standards
- improve pupils' progress in writing from early years upwards by enabling them to write imaginatively, at length and for different purposes
- build positive relationships with parents, communicate plans and policies more effectively and keep the website up to date.

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 Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Parkinson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you, the phase leaders and some subject leaders. I met with the school's business manager and special educational needs coordinator. I spoke with a representative from the local authority. I met with members of the governing body, including the vice chair. I visited several classes with you to observe teaching and learning. Together with some teachers, I looked at pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils from across the school. I took account of 38 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 39 free-text responses. I considered the 26 responses from staff

and 54 responses from pupils to the Ofsted online questionnaires. I also considered the school's own information from parent and pupil surveys. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and the school development plan. I viewed information about pupils' attainment and progress. I scrutinised the safeguarding documents and I undertook a review of the school's website.