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Mrs Jane Price
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Price

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Southam

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2019, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a caring, welcoming and purposeful community. It is very inclusive because of your commitment to meet the needs of all pupils. One parent reflects the view of many in saying: 'The school provides a nurturing environment, where the needs of the child are put first.' Leaders and teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide opportunities to enable pupils to meet them. Pupils take pride in their work, present it well and try hard. Their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are polite and confident and their enthusiasm for learning shines out. They understand and follow the school rules and routines, and rarely need to be reminded what to do. The school's values of love, patience, generosity, kindness and mutual respect are embedded across the school.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and identifies the priorities for improvement. You communicate your expectations effectively and have built a committed team of staff who share your vision and ambition for pupils. A comprehensive cycle of school improvement is securely embedded across the school. Actions are carefully monitored at regular intervals and the impact is evaluated before any further action is taken. Leaders actively engage and collaborate with a range of external partners. The challenge and support provided is welcomed and the feedback from external partners is used to refine the school's next steps for development.

Leaders and governors set high standards and check the quality of the school's work against these rigorously. You ensure that staff development and training are given a high priority. Staff value the opportunities to develop their skills and subject knowledge. Staff

who are new to the school are helped to learn the school's systems and leaders' expectations quickly. This approach is effective in ensuring consistency across the school.

Typically, pupils get down to work quickly because teachers show them what to do and how to do it. The tasks that pupils complete are usually suitably challenging. As a result, most make good progress and achieve well in the early years, and at the end of key stages 1 and 2. Most-able pupils attain well in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1. However, not enough most-able pupils make the progress they are capable of in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. In other areas of the curriculum, while activities interest and engage pupils, they are not always able to retain the knowledge and skills taught.

You have addressed the recommendations made at the time of your previous inspection. Improvements have been made to the teaching of phonics. Investment in resources and high-quality training for the staff has taken place. All adults have the skills needed to consolidate and extend the progress pupils make. As a result, pupils attain well in phonics and standards in reading are strong across the school. The previous inspection also recommended that standards in writing at the end of key stage 1 should be raised. This has been addressed by a greater focus on grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting.

Governors are highly ambitious for the school. They share your determination to provide pupils with the best possible education. They have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and provide both support and challenge where improvements are needed. Governors check the progress that different groups of pupils are making and ask searching questions when things need to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' safety is a high priority for the school. You and the governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff are provided with safeguarding training when they join the school, and this is updated annually. Staff are kept up to date with any changes as they occur. You ensure that all the appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out on staff and volunteers. Staff know their pupils well. Any concerns are reported, considered carefully and prompt action is taken. Case files are detailed and well organised.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. Staff, parents and carers confirm this view. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe in different situations. You ensure that through your curriculum, pupils get good information to help them keep safe. As one pupil said, 'Every time you go online you leave a digital footprint that somebody else can look at.' Others said, 'It is important to keep yourself safe online.' Pupils know to report any concerns about their safety to teachers and their parents. Pupils have a good awareness of the different types of bullying and the hurt that it can cause. They do not feel that there is a problem with bullying at their school.

Inspection findings

- In addition to evaluating the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils, I looked at: the progress made by pupils, especially the most able in writing and mathematics in key stage 2; the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning; and how well leaders promote good attendance and behaviour. By the end of key stage 2 in 2018, pupils made stronger progress in reading than in writing and mathematics. Although pupils attained well at the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics, less pupils attained the higher standard in writing and mathematics compared to national averages.
- Staff have received training in how to improve pupils' progress and attainment in writing. As a result, staff plan an increasing number of opportunities for pupils to write at length and to edit and redraft their work. Pupils' books show that recently introduced changes to the teaching of writing are beginning to improve the quality of pupils' writing, particularly at the higher standard. Across the school, you and your staff come up with some excellent ideas to inspire pupils to write. For example, using the stimulus of a Renaissance painting, pupils' writing in Years 5 and 6 conveyed empathy and different viewpoints. Pupils are being given the opportunity to develop creativity and the proficiencies needed for the higher standard. However, there has not been enough time for this to have made a positive difference to the achievement of the most able pupils.
- Teaching in mathematics is improving. The subject leader is clear about what needs to be done to continue to raise pupils' achievement. In Years 5 and 6, where there have been gaps, there has been a focus on ensuring that pupils' calculation strategies are strong. Teachers have been supported to improve their teaching. As a result of this, pupils are making good progress in mathematics. However, leaders recognise that more work is needed to ensure that the most able pupils achieve the higher standard in mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- The curriculum is rich and engaging. Some subjects are taught separately, and others are taught as part of a theme that makes pertinent links between subjects. The engaging topics and activities staff plan excite pupils and give them many memorable experiences. Pupils talked about writing biographies following a visit to Cadbury World and studying the Cadbury family. They spoke about designing their own vehicle as part of a topic on transport and that they learn French and German. However, the curriculum has been identified as a priority for improvement. While pupils speak enthusiastically about their learning and recall many of the worthwhile activities and events they have experienced, their recollection of important knowledge is less secure.
- The proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, who are persistently absent from school has been above the national average. Every possible strategy to increase pupils' attendance at school is being used. Each pupil's rate of absence is carefully monitored, and staff work supportively with parents when absence becomes a cause for concern. Individual pupils benefit from timely and effective support that removes barriers to their attending regularly. In recent months, the overall rate of pupil absence has fallen to below the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved considerably.

- The proportion of pupils who received at least one fixed-term exclusion from school was above the national average in 2016/17. Staff have worked effectively to help the small number of pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour. Teachers apply the rewards and sanctions within the school's behaviour policy consistently. The number of instances of serious misbehaviour has declined markedly over the past year, as has the school's use of the sanction of fixed-term exclusion.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to develop pupils' proficiency and creativity in writing, so that a greater proportion attain the higher standard at key stage 2
- teachers provide a higher level of challenge for the most able pupils in mathematics, so they develop their knowledge, deepen their thinking and extend their skills
- in reviewing the curriculum, more attention is given to how pupils retain the knowledge and skills they have been taught.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Townsend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the evaluation of the school's work and priorities for improvement. I reviewed a range of school documents, including those relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching and governors' meetings. I evaluated information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school's self-evaluation document and the school improvement plan. I met with three governors and spoke on the phone to the school improvement partner for the diocese. We jointly observed learning and behaviour in all classes and looked at pupils' books. I held a formal discussion with a group of pupils and spoke to others informally in the classrooms I visited. I spoke to some parents as they brought their children to school. I considered the 37 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, as well as the 35 online written comments received from parents during the inspection. I also met with you as designated safeguarding leader and reviewed documentation and records about how you keep your pupils safe.