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Mrs Joan Jenkins  
Headteacher  
Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School  
Kepler Street  
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Merseyside  
L21 3TE

Dear Mrs Jenkins

### **Short inspection of Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 29 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. Your strong leadership provides clear direction for the school, which is a well-established sanctuary of calm and effective learning for the pupils. The strong promotion of pupils' well-being serves your community well. This is particularly effective for those pupils who find it difficult to sustain concentration and engagement so that they overcome their barriers to learning.

You have a deep and accurate understanding of your school because of the comprehensive checking and evaluation carried out by you and other leaders. As a result, you are aware that pupils' progress and attainment in writing lag behind those seen in reading. However, you are not complacent and use this information well to identify the correct priorities for development, which are shared effectively with governors. These priorities are clearly identified in a well-structured development plan.

Careful investment by governors and close links with business have ensured that the school environment, including the outdoor space available to early years children, is a vibrant and engaging place in which pupils learn well.

Pupils who spoke with me say that they enjoy school very much. They like the range of educational trips that link to their curriculum studies and help them to deepen their knowledge and understanding. This was exemplified by pupils' comments about Roman history arising from experiences on a recent trip to Chester. Pupils said that they particularly like the many activities that bring reading to life.

Only a few parents and carers responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View. However, those that did shared their overwhelming support for the school. This is exemplified by the comment that staff, 'go above and beyond the expectations of any school for its pupils. Pupils are always encouraged, nurtured, guided and led in a positive manner at all times'.

Since the last inspection, the leadership of the school has been strengthened through the appointment of a new assistant headteacher and an early years leader. These members of staff share your drive for excellence and have a depth of knowledge that complements that of the existing leadership team. As a result of leaders' actions, literacy and numeracy are now promoted well across the school.

The effective leadership of English and early years has brought about considerable improvements in the progress pupils make from their starting points, particularly in reading. Appropriate actions enhance pupils' opportunities to develop their skills to ensure they can write effectively. Work in pupils' books confirms that the actions are having a positive impact on the standards of writing. However, the full impact of these actions has not yet been fully realised, particularly for the most able.

Subject leadership has improved because of the additional staff training and the heightened expectations that you now place on each subject leader. You ensure that subject leaders have appropriate time to evaluate the quality of teaching in their subjects and the impact it has on pupils' outcomes. Their improved analysis of each subject's effectiveness is shared with senior leaders and governors in well-structured reports called 'positional statements'. These are used successfully to inform development plans and ensure that accurate priorities and actions lead to further improvement.

The quality of teaching across the school has improved since the last inspection because of well-considered appointments to the teaching staff, appropriate training and investment in high-quality resources to support teachers and teaching assistants in their work. This has resulted in high-quality teaching across year groups, particularly in reading and mathematics.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are of a high quality and that they are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained and have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding, including that relating to online safety. They meticulously implement the school's policies relating to safeguarding and are vigilant about the potential risks pupils may face. Appropriate checks ensure the suitability of staff and governors to work with children. Safeguarding records are appropriate and diligently kept through the highly effective use of a secure online system. Leaders evaluate safeguarding records frequently to identify trends or patterns of concern. They act swiftly to share information with parents and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety. Governors ensure that appropriate monitoring and filtering arrangements are in place for the school's internet connection.

## Inspection findings

- A focus for this inspection was reading. You and your leaders have taken effective action to re-design the curriculum to promote reading. Teachers follow a detailed and well-structured plan that systematically develops pupils' knowledge and understanding in reading, while also encouraging a love of books. Focused studies of a range of different authors are celebrated through the effective use of colourful and engaging displays that share and celebrate pupils' work. For example, prominent displays in the hall share pupils' writing relating to the author's plots and characters from a recent study of Roald Dahl.
- Teachers are knowledgeable about effective strategies to teach reading because of the high-quality training they have received. They make reading exciting, for example by using role play of characters, such as The Grand High Witch in 'The Witches'. This immerses pupils in literature and brings learning to life. Class novels are carefully chosen by the highly knowledgeable subject leader. They are used effectively by teachers to model reading and develop pupils' comprehension skills. Teachers, particularly in key stage 2, develop pupils' range of vocabulary through the habitual promotion of the use of dictionaries and a thesaurus.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning well to check pupils' understanding of a broad vocabulary and help them to gain confidence in more complex reading skills. For example, in upper key stage 2, carefully phrased questions required pupils to apply inference and deduction skills to identify the reasons for the author's choice of words to describe Norfolk as a setting in a study 'Floodland' by Marcus Sedgwick.
- Pupils read frequently and experience a wide range of texts. They quickly grow in confidence, and develop high levels of fluency and a love of literature. Older, more experienced readers use pace, intonation and inflection well to help bring stories to life. Pupils confidently explain their favourite genres, and many identify their favourite authors or character within a series of books. Consequently, pupils made strong progress in reading from their starting points. However, they do not fully develop the more complex skills required to work at greater depth.
- Another focus for the inspection was the teaching of phonics. Well-trained teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of the systematic development of phonics skills and a range of effective strategies to teach it. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. They use assessments well to ensure that phonics tasks are closely matched to pupils' abilities. Leaders have ensured that a range of support strategies are appropriately used to help pupils who find learning to read difficult to catch up. Phonics is now taught effectively, including in early years.
- I focused on attendance because the rate of persistent absence among pupils is high and well above the national average for primary schools nationally. Many pupils are absent for good reasons linked to medical or mental health issues. However, despite the school's best efforts, a core group of families do not ensure that their children's education and welfare benefit from regular and punctual attendance.
- The school's knowledgeable and highly committed pastoral manager monitors absences meticulously to identify trends and concerns. This information is frequently shared with senior leaders, governors and authorities to ensure appropriate actions are taken to support and challenge families in getting their children to school.

Attendance is promoted strongly through a wide range of activities and rewards. These include the weekly class attendance cup, and attendance prizes for individuals and families. Additionally, pupils have worked with a professional photographer to create eye-catching posters to promote attendance. These are displayed prominently around the school. As a result, pupils are aware of the importance of attending school frequently and attendance is rising.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that teachers:

- build on the strong progress pupils now make from their starting points in reading, to enhance knowledge and understanding at greater depth
- improve the progress pupils make in writing to increase the proportion of pupils attaining greater depth in end-of-key-stage assessments.

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

Yours sincerely

John Nixon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your assistant headteacher (who is also the leader responsible for English), and the school's pastoral manager. I held meetings with the subject leaders of mathematics, computing and physical education, a group of governors (including the chair), and with the archdiocese school improvement partner who works with your school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school and listened to readers from key stages 1 and 2. I took account of the information contained within the responses to the online questionnaires for parents, Parent View. There were no responses to the online questionnaires for staff or pupils.

I visited classrooms with your assistant headteacher to observe pupils learning, and looked at their work in books and on display and at records of their learning. I reviewed information about pupils' progress and attainment. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation documentation, curriculum planning and development plans and other policies. I looked at provision for safeguarding and evaluated the impact of the school's policies, procedures and records to keep children safe, including while they are online.