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Mrs Cathie Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Williams

Short inspection of St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education at St Gabriel's since the last inspection and has ensured that the school continues to move forwards strongly. You, fellow leaders and governors have a clear focus on the needs of the community that the school serves and are determined to give every pupil the best possible start in life. To that end, you have focused on giving pupils the key skills that they need in English and mathematics, while also providing them with a wide range of enriching experiences through school trips and extra-curricular activities. The school's inclusive Christian ethos underpins all aspects of school life.

You, other leaders and the governors all know the school well. School self-evaluation is sharply focused picking out the school's many strengths while also identifying those areas that need further work. You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Attendance has risen to be in line with the national average, with particularly strong improvements in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' attainment overall is improving, and progress measures in key stage 2 in 2018 were among the best in the country. Senior leaders have ensured that subject leaders have access to a good range of professional development and have also acted as leadership mentors, developing subject leaders' skills and experience.

Pupils are polite and friendly. Their behaviour in class and around the school is consistently good, and this creates a calm and purposeful environment for learning. Leaders have made the best use of the space available in school, and staff and

pupils cope very well with the challenges posed at lunchtimes by a lack of space in the school hall. In class, pupils display positive attitudes to learning. These are evident from the enthusiasm shown by children in early years in developing their cutting skills, to the way in which pupils in Year 6 worked together when tackling problems involving scales and measurements. Relationships throughout the school between staff and pupils are warm and positive.

Pupils were keen to tell me about all the things they like about life at St Gabriel's. They enjoy the work that they do based on different topics, and particularly the trips they go on to enhance their learning. For example, older pupils explained that their visit to Quarry Bank Mill had helped them to imagine what life was like for those children in Victorian times who were expected to work in factories and mills. Pupils were also very positive about the range of sports in which they can take part, including dodgeball, swimming and gymnastics. You have ensured that provision for physical education (PE) and sport is of a high quality, well led by experienced sports coaches who give every pupil the chance to take part and succeed at their own level.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and there is a strong safeguarding culture throughout the school. Staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training and are clear about their role in keeping pupils safe. Staff are vigilant and make sure that any concerns they have about pupils' welfare are quickly reported and accurately recorded. Leaders work well in partnership with external agencies to ensure that any such concerns are addressed and support quickly put in place.

Leaders make sure that rigorous checks are made on staff, governors and regular visitors to the school to ensure that they are suitable people to work with children. Records of these checks, along with other records relating to safeguarding, are detailed and of a good quality. Pupils confirm that they feel safe in school and are confident that their teachers will look after them.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these looked at how effectively writing was being taught across the school. Attainment in writing was below average in key stage 1 and key stage 2, in both 2017 and 2018, and did not appear to be improving as strongly as in reading and mathematics.
- Raising attainment in writing has been a key focus for the school. Leaders for English have implemented a clear improvement plan. They have made sure that teachers use quality texts and interesting topics to encourage pupils to write. They have also focused on one particular writing genre at a time, providing staff with support and training to improve, for example, pupils' diary writing. Evidence in pupils' books shows they are developing the stamina to write at length in different styles and for different purposes. School assessment

information indicates that a greater proportion of pupils are meeting the school's expectations for writing across different year groups. Teachers work well with other local schools to check that their assessments of pupils' writing are accurate.

- Although pupils are writing with greater confidence and the overall quality of their writing is improving, there is further work to be done. Pupils are encouraged to use adventurous vocabulary in their writing, but sometimes choose words that inadvertently confuse or change the intended meaning. Similarly, pupils are not consistently choosing when to use complex sentences to best effect, and so at times their writing loses flow and clarity.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the teaching of phonics, as the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check had dropped to below average in each of the last two years.
- Your thorough tracking of pupils' performance confirmed that this apparent decline could be explained by specific factors affecting those two year groups, such as above-average mobility of pupils. Assessment information shows that a higher proportion of pupils are on track to achieve the expected standard this year.
- Current pupils are making strong progress in phonics because of the effective leadership of phonics and high-quality phonics teaching. Pupils' attainment is assessed at frequent intervals and they are then grouped according to their identified next steps. Teachers and teaching assistants deliver engaging phonics sessions focused on these next steps which move pupils' learning on further. Additional support is put in place for those pupils who need to catch up, so by the end of key stage 1 the great majority of pupils use phonics confidently to help them to read and spell.
- The final line of enquiry looked at the impact subject leaders were having on the quality of teaching and learning in subjects other than mathematics and English. This has been an area of focus for the school, and the positive impact of the work that has been done so far is evident. Subject leaders have played an important role in developing the school's broad and engaging curriculum. Well-chosen texts provide a clear link between work in English and other subjects, such as science and history. Regular 'theme weeks' are planned and delivered to provide more opportunities to develop pupils' learning over an extended period, in subjects such as music and art.
- The subject leader for art has developed a clear progression of the portrait-drawing skills pupils should have in different year groups. Staff have benefited from some focused training on this aspect of art, and the results can be seen in the very impressive portraits that pupils across the school have produced. Similarly, good work has been carried out in geography, where the subject leader has planned step-by-step developments in pupils' mapping skills, and in music.
- This strong progress in pupils' learning is not currently apparent in all subject areas. For example, in history, pupils across key stage 2 have completed similar, relatively simple, activities ordering events on a timeline without any increase in the level of challenge from year to year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils enhance the quality of their writing by increasing the accuracy with which they use ambitious vocabulary and complex sentence structures
- the effective work of the art and geography leaders in planning for progression in pupils' knowledge and skills over time is built upon across other subjects beyond mathematics and English.

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 Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you and other school leaders, including two groups of subject leaders. I had meetings with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, and I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the archdiocese. I also met a group of pupils to talk about school life. I took account of eight free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, alongside the results of the school's own parental survey. I also considered 12 responses to the staff survey. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also studied a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.