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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 March 2019

Mrs Imelda Cooper
Head of School
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School
Kirkley Cliff Road
Lowestoft
Suffolk
NR33 0DG

Dear Mrs Cooper

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2015.

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 previous inspection, there have been some significant changes in staffing. The previous headteacher left in December and you took up the position of acting headteacher in January 2019. In February, you were appointed to the role of head of school permanently. The St John the Baptist Catholic Multi-Academy Trust has also appointed an executive headteacher to provide additional capacity to the leadership of the school. In this short period of time, you have accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, leaders' plans for improvement have not been fully developed and do not provide precise information about how improvement will be achieved.

The school has also experienced changes in teaching staff, which has resulted in new subject leaders. Many of these leaders are new to their roles and are not yet effective because they have a limited understanding of the quality of the provision in their areas of responsibility. However, staff are positive about the recent changes and many feel that the new senior leaders value their work and provide a fresh vision for the school. As one staff member commented, 'There is a new buzz about the place since Christmas.'

You have responded quickly to concerns parents and carers have raised about the behaviour of pupils in the school. Using the school's new approaches, teachers set

high expectations for pupils' conduct both in the classroom and around the school. When visiting classes together, we observed good relationships between teachers and pupils. Pupils willingly contribute their ideas and opinions and receive positive encouragement to support them in their learning. Leaders continue to focus upon developing pupils' resilience and self-confidence. They highlight the importance of trying your hardest and reward the 'best challenge' or 'marvellous mistake' during weekly assemblies. Pupils value the support they receive from their teachers and told the inspector, 'Teachers always remind you that you are capable.'

Governors have worked with the trust to ensure that leadership of the school is secure. However, they are not able to monitor the progress the school is making towards achieving its aims with any accuracy. This is because the school plan for improvement lacks precision. Any planned actions are vague and there are no measurable targets that affect pupils' outcomes.

Most parents are positive about the school, although a few expressed concerns about how leaders have previously dealt with pupils' behaviour. Leaders are addressing this issue and parents recognise the direction new leaders are providing. Parents are supportive of the Christian ethos that underpins the values of the school and the progress made by the pupils. A typical parental comment from Ofsted's online questionnaire said, 'The school provides an excellent education and faith-based environment for my children.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Safeguarding training is up to date and staff's understanding is checked through a questionnaire. This ensures that they know how to apply what they have learned and recognise when children may be vulnerable or at risk. Procedures for recording concerns are well organised and advice is sought where leaders identify any concerns. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are sound. Recent changes in governors' responsibilities have meant that they have not made regular checks on safeguarding information and school processes. Training for governors has been identified so that they gain the expertise to check safeguarding records and policies.

Inspection findings

- In order to ascertain whether the school remained good, I focused on a number of lines of enquiry, investigating writing, key stage 1 attainment, performance of disadvantaged pupils, and the curriculum.
- In 2018, pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 in writing was well below the national average. Leaders have introduced a new approach to teaching writing. Greater use is made of a high-quality text, often linked to the topic being studied by the pupils. Teachers choose texts that engage pupils' interest and encourage them to use a range of descriptive vocabulary. For example, the use of the book,

'Goodnight Mister Tom' helped inspire pupils to convey their feelings about being evacuated during the war. However, pupils' writing in a range of forms and for different purposes is still limited.

- Your leaders have also introduced a different approach to assessing pupils' work. Teachers use this approach to identify how pupils can improve their writing by using their editing skills. The improvement pupils make is often limited to spellings and does not challenge pupils to think more deeply about their writing, especially the most able pupils.
- Together, we looked at a sample of pupils' writing books. These showed that not all teachers are clear about how pupils build their understanding of writing through a structured sequence of teaching. In these instances, pupils do not make links with previous aspects they have been taught and writing is not as fluent as it should be. Staff mobility and absence have meant that leaders have not been able to check how successfully your new approaches have been established across the school.
- The attainment of pupils in key stage 1 has become more variable over time. We carried out some joint observations to check the quality of teaching. Teachers make good use of questioning to check pupils' understanding and to probe their thinking. Clear scaffolds and use of resources provide useful prompts to support pupils' learning. However, work in pupils' books shows that the most able pupils are not challenged to think hard about their learning across a range of different subjects.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make consistently good progress, especially in writing and mathematics. I wanted to check how leaders were using the pupil premium to address pupils' barriers to learning. This is because there is no published strategy on the school's website.
- Leaders are using the funding to provide opportunities for disadvantaged pupils to attend before- and after-school clubs. Interventions are used to target additional support so that disadvantaged pupils catch up. Pupils who spoke to the inspector considered that they were making good progress and could identify individual targets they had been given in both writing and mathematics. Evidence from pupils' books and the school's own assessment information shows that pupils are making similar and sometimes slightly better progress compared with other pupils. However, the most able disadvantaged pupils are not making strong enough progress.
- The strategy for the use of the pupil premium funding has not been completed. While governors ask questions, they are not able to hold leaders to account because they do not know whether their actions are having an impact on helping disadvantaged pupils make stronger progress.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils develop a range of skills from a study of different subjects. Pupils spoke of the benefits from curriculum opportunities that utilise the school's location on the seafront. You and your leaders are currently reviewing the curriculum so that the school's values are drivers for the planning of activities and learning. There is a well-planned progression of skills for each subject and identified points which mark pupils' progress. However, the impact of the curriculum has not been fully evaluated.

Subject leaders are new to their roles and have not developed the skills to check the quality of teaching in each subject. Pupils' books show that the tasks they are given are similar for each group and do not extend and challenge learning for the most able pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors check leaders' safeguarding work so that there is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe across the school
- the school's improvement plan and strategy for the use of the pupil premium funding are reviewed so that targets are clear and measurable and used to hold leaders to account for pupils' outcomes
- recent initiatives to improve writing are established and checked by leaders to improve the achievement of pupils from all groups
- subject leaders develop the skills to monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility
- teachers plan activities to extend and challenge the thinking of the most able pupils across the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of East Anglia, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings jointly with you and the executive headteacher, other leaders and the trust's chief executive officer. I met with the trust's primary improvement leader. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you, in six classes. I spoke with pupils during my visits to lessons and met separately with a group of disadvantaged pupils. I also had discussions with a group of boys about their writing. I took into account the 35 responses from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 19 free-text comments that were received. I also took account of 13 responses to the staff survey. I scrutinised a range of school documents, including pupils' workbooks and the single central record of employment and vetting checks.