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Mrs Bernadette Corbett  
Executive Headteacher  
St Austin's Catholic Primary School  
Garden Street  
Stafford  
Staffordshire  
ST17 4BT

Dear Mrs Corbett

### **Short inspection of St Austin's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment as executive headteacher in January 2017, the school has gone through a period of significant change. At that time, the school became part of a Catholic multi-academy company (MAC) that consisted of one secondary school and seven primary schools. In September 2018, this MAC merged with another Catholic MAC to become a group of two secondary schools and 13 primary schools.

You, your head of school, the leadership team and governors have worked well together to identify priorities for improvement and strengthen existing good practice. You have high expectations of yourself, your staff and your pupils. With the support of your team, the chief executive officer (CEO) and directors of the MAC you are developing a strong culture of learning from best practice from across the MAC.

The school is warm and welcoming and the pupils are well cared for. Parents and carers are very positive about the school and its leaders. All the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, said that they would recommend the school to another parent. They are confident that their children are safe at school. Typical comments from parents included, 'I am absolutely happy, my child is doing brilliantly.'

Pupils who spoke to me overwhelmingly agreed that they were very happy at school. They would definitely recommend their school to another child. Pupils enjoy their learning and were very keen and proud to talk about their special class books. They trust the adults in school. Pupils believe that if they had a problem, they could speak to someone who would solve it for them.

Pupils are polite and very well mannered. Their behaviour in lessons, at playtimes and around the school is excellent. Pupils have a good understanding about how it is good to be different and enjoy learning about their own faith and the faith of others. They enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities including visits to the 'Think Tank', residential trips to Alton Castle and Condover Hall, and opportunities to join the choir and take part in the Young Voices concert in Birmingham.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They feel happy and well supported. The response by staff to the online survey was very positive, with the great majority of staff saying that they were proud to work at the school. Staff are positive about joining the MAC. They value the opportunities for training and for working alongside other staff in the group of schools.

Members of the local governing body and the directors of the MAC know the school very well. They support your high expectations. Through well-developed online systems and frequent visits to the school, they gain first-hand knowledge of the school, its pupils and staff. This helps them provide you with effective challenge and support.

At the time of the previous inspection, the school was asked to strengthen transition from early years to Year 1. You carefully plan the move from Reception class to Year 1 for all children and especially the most vulnerable. This has ensured that children are well equipped and ready for their next school year. The school has also ensured that pupils are confident and eager learners. They show very positive attitudes to learning.

In the previous inspection, inspectors recommended that you develop the role of middle leaders. With the support of your senior leaders and opportunities made available through the MAC, you have used a mixture of coaching and training to support the growth of middle leaders. This is something you intend to develop further.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders, including governors, ensure that all staff training is up to date. The school's safeguarding policy meets statutory requirements. When appropriate, you involve external agencies to support pupils and families. Staff are aware of the need to be vigilant and recognise signs that could raise concerns.

Pupils feel safe in school and talk confidently about how to stay safe, including

making reference to e-safety, road safety and how to keep healthy. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue at the school. They feel that behaviour is good and say that they have lots of friends. They value the assemblies and special lessons that help them know how to keep safe, such as the NSPCC assembly and Bikeability lessons.

## **Inspection findings**

- The first line of enquiry focused on the positive outcomes in writing for pupils by the end of key stage 2. You ensure that classrooms provide a rich language environment. Teachers and support staff model accurate use of language well. Staff have high expectations of the vocabulary pupils should use in their writing. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported and learning is well planned to help their development of language skills. You have accurately identified where teaching is not as strong and provided training and support to ensure at least good outcomes for all pupils. You and your middle leaders are using coaching to ensure that all staff are consistently adopting school practice. Pupils write at length and commented that they enjoy writing. Work in books and on display shows that pupils make good progress.
- We also agreed to look at the curriculum and how it helps pupils to develop knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects. You and school leaders have a clear vision and want to offer pupils a rich, broad and balanced curriculum that is engaging and creative. By planning your curriculum around your Catholic virtues and British values you provide learning that is purposeful, active and prepares pupils for life beyond primary school. You have introduced 'WOW' weeks and events to introduce topics and ensure strong links between themes, visits and written texts.
- Strong teaching develops good links between subjects. Pupils can see the connections between aspects of their learning. The use of special class books to celebrate and capture special 'WOW' weeks and events motivates pupils and develops their sense of pride in their learning. For example, pupils' work on remembrance and during Black History Week did this well.
- Where teaching is strong, standards in subjects such as science and history are high. However, expectations of standards of work in foundation subjects are not consistently high across the school. The importance placed on the use of rich vocabulary is beginning to have an impact on the quality of writing across all subjects.
- We also investigated how leaders across the school and the MAC are supporting and developing processes for school improvement. The merger of the two MACs has been successful. Staff, governors and parents comment favourably on developments since September 2018. There are well thought-out plans for the future and the school is effectively supported by the CEO of the MAC. Through thorough, accurate and honest self-evaluation and effective analysis of information, leaders have a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Roles and responsibilities are well known and understood. Opportunities to develop staff's knowledge and skills are well

planned, monitored and evaluated.

- In 2017/18, absence and persistent absence were above national averages. Absence data has been carefully analysed, including information for groups of pupils. Actions taken as a result of this analysis are reducing absences. However, absence rates are still above the national average and disadvantaged pupils' absence is still too high.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff have consistently high expectations of pupils' work in foundation subjects
- rates of attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, continue to improve.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of directors and the CEO of the MAC, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tina Willmott  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school and CEO of the MAC to discuss the school's effectiveness, school improvement planning and self-evaluation. I also met with the chair of the local governing body, the chair of the board of directors and the vice-chair of directors. I met with a group of staff, spoke with pupils at breaktime and with a group of pupils from key stage 2 in the afternoon.

We visited every class together, observed pupils' learning, looked at their books and talked to pupils about their work. We spent time looking at pupils' writing and topic books.

I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and also analysed the 44 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 27 free-text comments. I considered 19 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and 73 pupil responses. We discussed pupils' progress information, attendance data and monitoring information. I scrutinised staff recruitment arrangements and the school's safeguarding procedures and documentation. I also studied governors' minutes.