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Mrs Fiona Maynard
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Maynard

Short inspection of St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 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 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 previous inspection. Together with senior leaders, you have led a successful drive to improve teaching and learning. Senior leaders are proven, successful teachers, offering strong support and expertise to colleagues at various stages of their career so that the quality of teaching continues to improve. Staff receive regular professional development opportunities to develop their skills, including in leadership. When new initiatives are started, leaders ensure that staff have the right training and subject knowledge to equip them for their roles. This approach successfully tackles one of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Staff morale is high. All who expressed a view said that they felt proud to be part of the staff team.

Senior leaders have a thorough understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that need to improve. Improvement plans contain clear, measurable success criteria so that leaders at all levels can be held closely to account. Middle leaders also understand how well their subject is taught and how well pupils are achieving. They undertake a range of monitoring activities, including observing teaching and scrutinising pupils' work, to check that teaching is enabling pupils to achieve well.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They find lessons interesting and challenging because teachers find ways of making sure that all pupils understand. One boy explained, 'Everyone is treated in a way that will help you achieve what you need to achieve.' Pupils know that they will also find help from their classmates if they start

to struggle. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They plan carefully, making sure that lessons are adapted to meet the needs of all pupils including, in particular, the most able pupils. Consequently, pupils, whatever their level of ability, have positive attitudes to learning, work hard and are proud of their successes.

The school's Catholic values play a vital role in the school. These values have a wholly positive impact on pupils, helping them to develop as confident, caring individuals with a clear sense of right and wrong. Pupils have a thorough understanding of equality and are clear that there is no derogatory language or name-calling. They are confident that any new pupils to the school would make friends quickly in this harmonious, happy community. Pupils enjoy taking up the many opportunities to assume responsibility in the school in such roles as peer mediators and as part of the chaplaincy team.

Parents are positive about the school. One said: 'I have found the headteacher and all other staff... to be friendly and dedicated to the school and its pupils.' Senior leaders and teachers have worked hard to involve parents in their children's education. Parents feel well informed about how well their children are doing, including through attending weekly drop-in session in classrooms. An increasing number of parents also attend the various events held in the school to help them support their children's learning at home.

The local academy committee contains a range of members with the right skills and experience to provide senior leaders with robust support and challenge. They know the school well because members ask questions, analyse published information about outcomes and visit the school to undertake a range of monitoring activities. The chair explained, 'We see it and feel it for ourselves.' This approach has successfully tackled another area for improvement from the previous inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding, where everyone accepts and embraces their responsibility for keeping pupils safe. Staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding because leaders ensure that all are trained before they start working at the school. Leaders also provide staff with regular updates so that everyone has the latest information and advice about keeping pupils safe. All staff understand how to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk and how to report and record their concerns. When the need arises, senior leaders work closely with external agencies to secure the well-being of vulnerable pupils and families.

Pupils feel safe in school. They are kind and thoughtful to each other because the school's values expect this of them. Pupils understand what bullying means, including cyber bullying. They say that bullying almost never happens, but that when it does it is dealt with quickly and decisively. Pupils learn how to stay safe in a variety of situations, including if caught in a fire, on the road, and when online.

Inspection findings

- I identified three areas to focus on during this inspection. First, I considered how well the curriculum enables pupils to achieve well in a range of subjects. Teachers plan the curriculum carefully, so that pupils acquire knowledge and skills in a range of subjects. Senior leaders identify clearly the key concepts, knowledge and vocabulary that need to be taught in each topic. This careful planning makes sure that pupils learn new ideas systematically and deepen their understanding across the curriculum.
- Pupils have many opportunities to apply their skills in reading and writing in other subjects. Pupils' work across the curriculum is of the same good standard as seen in their English books. Work displayed around the school provides clear evidence of the high-quality work pupils produce, including in art. Self-portraits of pupils in Year 6 in the style of the artist Julian Opie were particularly memorable, as were detailed oil pastels of Ted Hughes' 'The Iron Man', drawn by Year 4 pupils. Pupils also achieve well in religious education because leaders place a high importance on this subject.
- Pupils love the many visits to exciting places that the curriculum provides. During the current school-wide enrichment week, during which the whole school was studying architecture, pupils visited such places as Dorney Court, the London Eye and The Shard. Visitors to the school also help to create memorable learning experiences. These visits and visitors help to bring learning to life for pupils and create a strong appetite for learning.
- Next, I looked at how teaching enables boys to achieve well in writing. In recent years, boys have achieved much less well than girls at the end of key stages 1 and 2. Teachers place a high priority on equipping pupils with the vocabulary they need to be successful writers. Teachers make sure that children are introduced to unfamiliar words and learn their meaning before meeting them in books or in lessons. This helps pupils to develop a wide vocabulary, which they use accurately in their writing. For example, pupils in Year 4 used and understood the word 'align' when describing the placement of Roman roads.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to write at length, and there is clear evidence of progress in all pupils' books, including those of disadvantaged pupils. The most able boys typically write with great flair and accuracy and make strong progress. Boys of average and lower ability do not achieve as well as girls in writing. There are clear differences in the quality of these boys' writing when compared with that of girls of similar ability.
- Finally, I considered the effectiveness of the teaching of reading in key stage 1. Pupils achieve well in the Year 1 phonics screening check, thus addressing the last area for improvement that inspectors asked the school to address at the previous inspection. However, pupils achieve much less well in reading at the end of key stage 1. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher standard in reading at the end of Year 6 has also been below the national average in recent years.
- Senior leaders have placed a strong focus on reading and on helping pupils to develop a love of books. Teachers in all year groups read stories to their class

regularly. As a result, pupils grow to enjoy literature and gain an understanding of what makes stories enjoyable and exciting. Pupils in key stage 1 enjoy books and read well. However, they are passive readers because staff decide on the best books for pupils to read, and so pupils do not understand how to choose suitable books for themselves. The focus of the teaching of reading in Year 1 has been to help pupils acquire a strong understanding of phonics. This means that the teaching of other reading skills, such as comprehension, has not helped pupils to prepare well enough for the greater challenges of reading in Year 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- boys' writing across the school improves so that a greater proportion achieve at the expected and higher standards
- the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading at the end of key stage 1, and the higher standard at the end of key stages 1 and 2, improves.

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

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met regularly throughout the day, along with the deputy headteacher and the two assistant headteachers, to discuss a range of topics. These included outcomes for pupils, the curriculum and safeguarding. We also met early in the inspection to discuss leaders' self-evaluation of the school.

I had a meeting with you, an assistant headteacher and three middle leaders to discuss the curriculum and the role of middle leaders. I had a meeting with two members of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. I also met with a representative of the local authority. Together, we visited classes in all year groups, except Year 3, to observe teaching and learning. During these visits we looked at pupils' work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at playtime, and had a meeting with a group of 13 pupils representing Years 2 to 6. I considered 28 responses to the pupil survey, 27 responses to the staff questionnaire, and 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke to several parents on the playground at the end of the day.

I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, and development plans. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding policies, procedures and checks, and spoke with several members of staff at various times during the school day to test out their understanding of safeguarding arrangements.