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Dianne Mason
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Dear Dianne Mason

Short inspection of St John the Evangelist Catholic Primary

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

There have been significant changes to staffing and the governing body (known as the Local Academy Committee) since the previous inspection. You and the Multi-Academy Company (MAC) are managing these changes successfully to ensure that there is no disruption to pupils' learning. The MAC has utilised staff from other schools in the company, both for teaching and staff development purposes, to ensure that all pupils receive the very highest quality of education. Training and support have been provided for all staff and a new leadership team is in place to help raise standards even further.

The directors are fully involved in decisions about the strategic direction of the school. They are developing their understanding of the school through recently assigned subject link-roles. They offer leaders support and also challenge them by asking appropriately evaluative questions about aspects of school improvement. Directors work closely with designated leaders for safeguarding and fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They keep themselves well informed and up-to-date with training, and they check safeguarding procedures so that pupils are kept as safe as possible. Directors monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of additional funding, such as the pupil premium and the physical education (PE) and sport premium. They are currently highly involved in plans to rebuild the school on one site.

Most parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and those who spoke to inspectors during the inspection, shared positive views about the school. They agree that their children are safe, happy, well looked after and taught well. Many parents commented on the positive relationships in school and say that teaching staff are approachable and sort out any issues. One parent, reflecting the views of many, said, 'The nurturing ethos of the school is what makes it a special place.' A small number of parents expressed some concerns over recent staff changes and communication between home and school. The school is working hard to ensure clear messages are sent to parents in a timely manner.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and speak highly of their teachers. In lessons, they are focused and engaged and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils' behaviour both in lessons and at social times is exemplary. Many pupils said their favourite subjects were PE and sport, reflecting the wide range of activities and opportunities pupils are given to keep fit and healthy. Pupils have the opportunity to take part in a number of extra-curricular clubs, trips and visits with the gardening club proving to be very popular with pupils.

Staff say they are proud to work at the school and that the school has a culture that encourages calm and orderly conduct and is aspirational for pupils.

There was a dip in standards following the last inspection but you are working with other schools in the MAC and the teaching school alliance to drive improvement. As a result, directors and leaders have implemented effective systems to improve teaching and learning and strengthen leadership.

You have continued to address the areas for development identified at the last inspection. Early years teachers now use questioning more effectively to check pupils' understanding. Children entering the Nursery are taught how to hold their pencil and the correct formation of letters. There is an expectation that they practise this regularly. The focus on writing continues throughout the school, so that by the end of key stage 2 the vast majority of writing is high-quality, carefully organised and neatly presented.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a strong culture for safeguarding pupils. Necessary training and guidance have been provided to ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in protecting pupils from harm. High levels of vigilance and excellent relationships between staff and pupils ensure that any concerns are picked up and reported appropriately. Safer recruitment checks are detailed and clear, and all adults are fully vetted to ensure that they are safe to work with children. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils' knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe are highly developed,

especially in relation to online safety. Pupils understand what is meant by cyberbullying and know how to protect themselves when using social media or the internet. Pupils know who they can talk to if they have a problem and are confident that any issues would be sorted out by a member of staff.

Inspection findings

- The leadership team, including MAC directors, the acting executive principal and the head of school, are all highly experienced and are continually looking for ways to improve pupils' progress, especially in phonics and reading. Together, they have identified clear strengths and areas for improvement. Training and support are being provided to staff to assist them in doing their jobs well.
- For the last two years the numbers of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 has been below national averages. This was due to gaps in staff knowledge. Since September 2018, a specialist leader in phonics from the MAC has been assisting with phonics planning, small targeted teaching groups and training. During the inspection some examples of high-quality teaching were observed both in lessons and in books. The school's own data shows an improving picture and inspection evidence confirmed this. High-quality modelling of early reading was observed in the Nursery, where staff shared the story 'Whatever Next' and used props to bring to life Baby Bear's adventures. Early years and key stage 1 classrooms are bright and attractive and have a good balance of materials to support children's learning in reading and writing, as well as displays that celebrate their work.
- Over the last three years, attainment in reading by the end of key stage 2 has been below national averages. Recent changes have been made to the way reading is taught. Guided reading sessions now take place on a daily basis and books show that a wide range of high-quality texts are studied within lessons. For example, Year 6 pupils have undertaken reading activities based on 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' by John Boyne. As a result, pupils are now making good progress in reading. Staff focus on developing pupils' vocabulary through reading and this is transferred into their writing. An example of this was seen in Year 3, where pupils wrote 'Water-cycle Poems' linked to their science topic. The presentation of the poems was of a high standard, with pupils' handwriting joined neatly and accurately. While there have been improvements in the teaching of reading, pupils do not talk enthusiastically about their reading experiences. There is not the 'love of reading' that might be expected from pupils of this age. Pupils said if they could improve anything about their school it would be reading areas within classrooms and their school library.
- Over time, pupil absence has been above national averages. In order to tackle this problem, you have implemented a consistent policy and approach. The MAC's Educational Welfare Officer works closely with the school and absences are followed-up through phone calls, letters and attendance clinics. Strict adherence to these procedures has resulted in improved attendance rates across the school. However, a few pupils continue to miss too much school. This disrupts their learning. More needs to be done to ensure that more pupils attend school

regularly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the culture of reading throughout the school is improved so that pupils develop a love of reading
- they build on the effective procedures for managing absence by providing more challenge and support for families of pupils who are consistently absent.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy council, the executive director 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

Heather Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the senior executive leader of the MAC, other members of the leadership team and with teaching staff. I also met with three other directors and the chair of the local academy committee and the school's academy manager. I carried out short observations of teaching in different year groups and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. I talked with pupils in lessons and at breaktime and met with a small group to talk about school life and work. I spoke with several parents at the end of the school day. I explored several key lines of enquiry, including the impact of leadership and management on pupils' attainment in phonics and reading, attendance and absence rates, and safeguarding. I took into account the 16 responses to Parent View, and the 16 written comments from parents. I considered the 14 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I looked at several documents, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school's improvement plans and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe.