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Mrs E Eccles
Principal
St Joseph's RC Primary School Manchester
Richmond Grove
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Dear Mrs Eccles

Short inspection of St Joseph's RC Primary School Manchester

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Staff morale is high. Staff who replied to Ofsted's staff questionnaire agreed that they are proud to be a member of the school and that the school is well led and managed. You lead by example and are committed to the school and the local community. This is exemplified through the project, 'The bread and butter thing' where you support your families by providing them with food parcels at a low cost. This has strengthened the relationships between home and school. Governors spoke with pride about the positive impact this has had within the local community.

Leaders have created a culture of caring, learning and growing together. Teachers, teaching assistants, governors and pupils are keen 'to be the best that you can be' as your school motto states. Across the school, pupils are nurtured and well cared for. You have ensured that every pupil has the chance to succeed academically in an environment where pupils' well-being is still at the heart of the school. Consequently, over the last two years, standards across the school have risen and the progress pupils make is now much stronger.

The school is a happy and vibrant place to be. Visitors to the school are warmly welcomed. Throughout the school, wall displays celebrate examples of pupils' learning across an exciting and well-planned curriculum.

There have been many changes in staffing since the last inspection. This period of change has not been without its challenges and has hindered the rate of school improvement in some areas. However, you now have an established and

knowledgeable leadership team who have made many improvements to their areas of responsibility. This includes your governors, who are highly skilled and involved in all aspects of school life. As a result, the support and challenge that they provide is extremely effective.

Pupils behave well in class and around school. They are very confident and respond positively to your high expectations. The pupils with whom I spoke are proud of their school and value their education. Pupils enjoy coming to school because of the rich learning experiences, and the 'fun lessons' their teachers plan for them.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve leadership and management, by ensuring that subject leaders, other than English and mathematics, check how well their subject plans promote good teaching and learning. You shared the work that your subject leaders do, and the training that they have received. However, some of your middle leaders are new to their role and do not have a clear understanding of assessment and how it can be used to drive school improvements in their area of responsibility. You were also asked to raise achievement in writing, especially for the most able. This became a key line of enquiry during the inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and are at the core of the school's ethos. There is a strong culture around keeping children safe throughout the school and in the wider community. Leaders know the local community very well and, as a result, are aware of the dangers that pupils may encounter. Governors are highly knowledgeable and as a result, they have a deep understanding of safeguarding concerns. Staff and governors receive a wide range of comprehensive training. Consequently, they know what to do if they have concerns about pupils' safety or well-being. Appropriate checks are made on staff and visitors.

Pupils feel safe, respected and loved at school. They enjoy the relationships that they have with their friends and with the staff. A typical comment, reflecting the views of many pupils spoken to, was that, 'Teachers at this school don't just care for us, they are our friends, we chat together about things.' Leaders plan many opportunities for pupils to learn about staying safe, for example when they are online or in the local community.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I focused on several lines of enquiry. The first was to see whether attendance had improved for all pupils. I also looked at whether persistent absenteeism had reduced. The attendance of all pupils is monitored by leaders, who check the reasons why any pupil is absent from school. If there are concerns regarding a pupil's attendance, action is taken. You work closely with external agencies to provide help and support for families and, as a last resort, you fine parents when necessary. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance across the school is slowly improving and is now in line with the national average. Despite leaders' actions, there are still a few pupils who are persistently

absent from school.

- My next line of enquiry concerned outcomes for children in the early years. This enquiry was because the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development had risen significantly in 2018. Children get a very good start to school in the early years. Strong provision is evident across a vibrant and well-resourced environment. Leaders have developed an imaginative outdoor environment that provides children with opportunities to enjoy activities which are 'bigger, louder and messier'.
- In the indoor and outdoor learning environments, there is a range of adult and child-initiated learning opportunities that develop children's basic mathematical and reading skills. For example, in the mud kitchen, children were learning key vocabulary like, 'lumpy', 'goeey' and 'soil', and practising their sounds and writing recipes. Teachers ensure that all children are challenged in their learning through the use of 'rainbow challenges' and they check that children have achieved these during the week.
- Leaders identify children who are not making expected progress and implement additional help and support so that they can catch up. For example, a high proportion of children have difficulties with language and communication when they start at the school. Extensive training has ensured that all early years staff provide focused teaching for small groups and individuals. From very low starting points, children in the early years are making strong progress and are ready for the next stage in their education.
- I also considered the progress that the most able boys were making in their writing. This was because, in 2018, both at the end of key stage 1 and in the key stage 2 national assessments, too few boys did well. Leaders have prioritised writing for all pupils in the school's improvement plan. Across the school, writing has been brought to life because of the skilfully planned learning experiences and the school's curriculum. Pupils spoke to me enthusiastically about how, after a trip to the beach, they were keen to write. As one pupil stated, 'Feeling the sand in my toes helped me to write better.' Across the school, during 'can you' time, pupils are challenged to improve their writing. They self-assess and edit their work well. School information shows that boys are making faster progress from their starting points this year. The proportions of Year 2 and Year 6 boys' writing at the higher levels is increasing.
- Finally, I looked at the progress that the most able pupils were making in mathematics across key stage 2. This was because, in 2018, the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher standard declined compared with the previous year. Leaders have identified weaknesses in pupils' understanding in mathematics. They have redesigned the mathematics curriculum to ensure that there are always opportunities for the most able to be challenged. Regular problem-solving activities are now included as well as a consistent approach to the teaching of times tables.
- School information shows that pupils are making stronger progress in mathematics. More pupils in Year 6 are reaching the higher standard. However, pupils with whom I spoke said that they still felt they could be challenged further in their mathematics. As one pupil stated, 'We want to really stretch our brains.'

The work in pupils' books and in the lessons visited showed that some pupils do not have opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge in challenging real-life contexts.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent
- pupils have more opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in real-life contexts
- they support middle leaders in gaining a clear understanding of assessment information and how it can be used to drive school improvements in subjects other than English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Barlow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I observed teaching and learning and scrutinised examples of pupils' work. I met with you, senior and middle leaders and the office manager. I spoke with pupils in key stage 2 and with pupils informally in lessons and around the school. I also spoke with four governors, including the chair of the governing body.

I took account of the six free-text responses from parents. I took account of 11 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the 101 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's self-evaluation; the school's development plans and assessment records; minutes of the governing body meetings; safeguarding documentation; and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. I considered information posted on the school's website.