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Mrs C McKinnon
Headteacher
Our Lady of Walsingham Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs McKinnon

Short inspection of Our Lady of Walsingham Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 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.**

As headteacher, you set high expectations for yourself and your staff. Staff and governors share your dedication and determination to improve standards for the pupils in your care. Following your appointment in September 2018, you have ensured that you have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You have created a team that embodies the school's motto: 'Working together to inspire and learn, guided by God's love.'

Most parents and carers who spoke to me, and those who accessed Ofsted's online questionnaire, commented positively about the help and support you and your staff provided for them and their children. Parents say that communication between home and school is improving. They feel better informed about how they can help their children at home. Parents appreciate the many activities provided for their children, and your presence at the school gate each morning. Parents say that their children are happy and enjoy coming to school.

Pupils are polite and well-mannered. Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously as members of committees and as role models for younger pupils. Pupils who spoke with me shared proudly the contributions they make to improving the school, for example the recent installation of a willow tunnel. Pupils are eagerly awaiting the

arrival of the school's new fish. One pupil commented that, 'Fish are very calming, and people will feel much better watching them if they are upset.' Pupils appreciate the range of clubs available including golf, multi-sports and football. Members of the school's choir spoke passionately about their performance with other local schools at the Echo Arena in Liverpool.

Leaders have not responded swiftly enough to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, particularly in the way that writing is taught. Since your appointment, you and your leadership team have been proactive in working to resolve the issues identified. You have worked effectively with support from the local authority and the diocese to ensure that teachers have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to bring about the changes necessary. However, weaknesses in the teaching of phonics remain. Staff appreciate the opportunity to share knowledge and expertise with colleagues, including colleagues in other schools. Training for teachers enables them to use assessment information effectively. Teachers identify the precise gaps in pupils' learning, particularly in their vocabulary knowledge and the accurate application of grammar, spelling and punctuation. During the inspection, we reviewed the impact of the actions you have taken, particularly for the most able pupils. Leaders review the progress pupils make and routinely check on the quality of teaching. The school's own assessment information indicates that an increasing proportion of pupils in key stage 2 are beginning to work at a greater depth in their writing. This was confirmed in pupils' work and the learning we observed. You challenge staff effectively and take swift action to provide support when necessary. Improvements are at an early stage and therefore have had a limited impact on improving pupils' progress. Poor attendance also hinders progress for a high proportion of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Effective systems are in place to check that all adults in school are safe to work with children, including volunteers and other professionals. The training that staff receive enables them to identify any signs of neglect or abuse. Safeguarding arrangements are understood by staff. Leaders work very effectively with other agencies, including the police and social care. They ensure that pupils and families receive guidance and support when necessary.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet and when out in the local community. Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take. They are confident that should any bullying occur then teachers deal with it quickly. They say that teachers help pupils to make the right choices about how they behave towards others. Pupils who spoke with me said they feel safe in school and that there is always someone to talk with if they have any worries.

Inspection findings

- I was interested to see what actions had been taken to improve writing, particularly in key stage 2. Since your appointment, leaders have reviewed how writing is taught and have sought support from the local authority to improve how teachers use assessment information. As a result, teachers identify the gaps in pupils' learning. The activities that teachers plan meet pupils' needs effectively and provide appropriate challenge. Staff give pupils who are struggling the help they need to catch up. The checks that we made on pupils' work show that pupils are beginning to apply their grammar, spelling and punctuation skills with increasing accuracy when writing independently. Pupils' pride in their work is reflected in the good quality of their presentation.
- Leaders have designed a curriculum that exposes pupils to a rich vocabulary through carefully selected texts. Pupils use their increasing vocabulary knowledge effectively in their writing. Pupils in Year 5 used very evocative language to describe a character from the novel 'Beowulf'. For example, 'With teeth as sharp as a knife, he ripped his prey apart, blood dripping from his repulsive fangs.' However, the changes that you have made are at an early stage. They are not fully embedded, and it is too soon to see the impact on improving outcomes at the end of key stage 2, particularly for the most able pupils.
- We also discussed the actions taken to support the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school. Leaders have identified the barriers to learning that these pupils have. The appointment of a dedicated family worker has enhanced the pastoral systems in school. Sessions for parents to provide them with the skills and knowledge to help their children at home with their social and emotional development are well attended. Leaders work closely with other agencies and charities to provide additional support for pupils and their families.
- Training for staff enables them to support well the most vulnerable pupils. Pupils are developing strategies to cope in stressful situations, for example through mindfulness activities such as yoga club. Support staff help pupils who are struggling to catch up. Leaders provide opportunities to broaden pupils' horizons through visits to museums and residential trips to develop resilience. Older pupils talked enthusiastically about a recent careers event. They are aspirational for the future, for example to have their own hairdressing business or join the armed services. However, poor attendance for a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils hinders the progress they make. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make less progress than other pupils in the school.
- The proportion of pupils who achieve well in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has declined in recent years. I was interested to see how phonics is taught. Leaders' review of how phonics is taught identified variations in teachers' knowledge and understanding. The content of the phonics curriculum does not build systematically on pupils' prior learning. Pupils are often unsure about the strategies to use to decode new words. At times, reading resources do not match the phonic skills of pupils well. Pupils do not routinely apply their phonic knowledge in their own writing. This hinders the progress that they make in their reading and writing in key stage 1. Leaders have correctly identified actions to

bring about improvement in the way phonics is taught, including working with the national English hub in the North West. However, recent improvements have not been fully implemented.

- Next, we reviewed how you are improving outcomes for children in the early years. Leaders clearly explained the reason for the decline in the proportion of children who reached a good level of development in 2017. A high proportion of children in this cohort have specific special educational needs. Leaders in the early years have a good understanding of how children learn. Carefully planned activities before the children start school ensure that they settle quickly into well-established routines. You have taken a range of steps to involve parents in their children's learning. Parents are beginning to engage with the opportunities leaders provide, for example to join in with craft and reading activities alongside their children.
- Children join the school with skills and knowledge below those of other children of a similar age nationally. Leaders use assessment information effectively to identify the next steps in children's learning. Training for staff enables them to support well children's language and ability to communicate clearly. Staff correct mispronunciations sensitively. They use questions to encourage conversation. Positive relationships are fostered well by adults. Children help each other and chat happily together as they learn and play. Children make good progress from their starting points and an increasing proportion of children are on track to reach a good level of development at the end of this academic year.
- We discussed the actions you have taken to improve the attendance of pupils, including those who are persistently absent from school. Attendance for a high proportion of pupils has been below the national average for the past three years. You know your families extremely well. Staff follow up swiftly when pupils are absent from school. You work directly with families and other agencies to ensure that families receive the guidance and support they need. There is a range of rewards and incentives, which contribute to the improving attendance of pupils who are persistently absent from school. However, a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This impacts negatively on the progress that pupils make, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed the improvements made to the way writing is taught
- they build on the improvements made to engage parents, particularly in the early years
- teachers have the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to teach phonics systematically and consistently from Reception
- they build on the actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils to overcome their barriers to learning so that they make good progress and reach the expected standards by the end of key stage 2

- they improve attendance, particularly of disadvantaged pupils, so that their attendance is in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, other members of the leadership team and staff. I also spoke with five members of the board of governors. I visited classrooms with you where I had the opportunity to speak with pupils and look at their work. I met with a group of pupils formally during the day and spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I considered the four responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire. I considered 13 free-text comments and the 16 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the single central record.