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19 July 2019

Mrs Natalie Kelly
Headteacher
St Joseph's School, a Catholic Voluntary Academy
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Dear Mrs Kelly

Short inspection of St Joseph's School, a Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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.

You and your staff have created an environment in your school where pupils, teachers and staff work alongside each other, so that everyone enjoys a beneficial learning experience. Parents and carers, staff and pupils speak highly of the school. Pupils speak positively about the school and its values, stressing that it is one that is caring and one that encourages everyone to look after one another.

You have dealt with the recommendations made at the time of the previous inspection of your school. Your school improvement plans are detailed and identify clearly how you will measure the success of your actions. Teachers and leaders work together to monitor the progress of pupils regularly, and take the necessary actions if pupils are not meeting expectations. Pupils are given lots of opportunities in their mathematics lessons to reason and solve problems too. In all the books I scrutinised during the inspection, teachers provided advice for pupils, which tells them how to improve their work.

Teachers set high expectations in all classrooms. In all lessons observed, and all books scrutinised, the quality of pupils' work was of a high standard. Teachers provide pupils with the guidance they need to successfully deepen and extend their learning. Pupils told me that they mostly find their work challenging and that teachers are always available to support them. Teaching assistants are used skilfully

by teachers to support the learning of those pupils who require additional guidance. School leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and areas where more development is required in the school. Leaders' evaluations closely agree with my findings from this inspection.

In the lessons I observed, pupils were keen to take part in all the activities and tasks set for them. The pupils' books I scrutinised were well presented, with no examples of untidy or careless work. Pupils told me that the school is welcoming of everyone. Pupils talk proudly and happily about their school.

In 2018, at the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress in reading and writing was below average. You have responded by ensuring that reading is central to all the work the school does across all year groups. You have introduced the 'reciprocal reading' approach and English mastery sessions, which challenge pupils to develop important skills in reading and writing. Pupils' books, in a wide range of subjects, evidence opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills through extended writing tasks. You and your staff are working effectively with parents and carers to engage their help in supporting their child's reading too. The school's achievement information, my scrutiny of pupils' workbooks and listening to pupils' reading showed me that, overall, current pupils are making improved and good progress in their reading and writing.

Published performance information in 2018 suggested that those pupils who are disadvantaged do not make the same progress as others who have similar starting points. You have responded to this by ensuring the progress of all pupils is regularly and closely monitored. By doing so, you can quickly identify those who are falling behind expectations. This has been a particularly successful strategy for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are now making the same, or better, progress than others in the school who have similar starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors fulfil their legal safeguarding duties. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff and governor training is regular and routine. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose. Records, including the single central record of checks on adults' suitability to work and volunteer at the school, are robustly maintained. You and leaders work successfully and extensively with local agencies to be sure that the needs of pupils and their families are addressed effectively.

Pupils say that behaviour is good around the school and they feel safe. They say that bullying is very rare, but if it were to happen, teachers and staff will help them to resolve any problems. They have great faith that any adult in the school will listen to them and act on any worries that they may have.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we agreed that we would focus on: how well leaders ensure that pupils' reading improves; how well teaching ensures pupils make stronger progress in writing; how leaders ensure that those pupils who are disadvantaged make at least the same progress that others with similar starting points do; and how leaders are taking action to improve the attendance of those pupils who are regularly absent from the school.
- Over time, pupils' progress in reading has been below average. You have taken actions to create a culture whereby pupils value reading as an important skill, but also an activity they enjoy. During my visits to lessons, I observed pupils enthusiastically engaged in reciprocal reading activities, including paired reading and discussions. Such activities are helping to develop pupils' reading and comprehension skills. Pupils are reading books that challenge and interest them. These books are closely matched to pupils' current phonics skills, allowing them to use these skills to sound out and blend sounds so that they can decode words successfully. Pupils are developing the confidence to attempt books that stretch and develop their reading skills. In some cases, these include books they are reading independently at home. Consequently, current pupils are making good progress in their reading. You acknowledge that creating a strong culture of reading in your school is still a challenge. Although many parents and carers are supporting their children in their reading, there remains more work to do to embed this culture further.
- Published performance information for the end of key stage 2 in 2018 indicates that pupils did not make good progress in writing. Through the reciprocal reading and English mastery approaches you have adopted, teachers link the development of writing in your school to reading and comprehension. Through these learning strategies, pupils analyse texts, retrieve information from them, and write at length about their understanding of characters, storylines and how authors use vocabulary, for example. Additionally, pupils are given lots of opportunities to develop their writing skills in all subjects. Consequently, the development of pupils' writing skills is embedded in practice across the school and current pupils are making good progress in their writing.
- School leaders and governors ensure that the additional funding the school receives to support pupils who are disadvantaged is used effectively. You have ensured that teachers focus on these pupils and consider their needs in the planning of learning. Classroom support and any additional interventions are provided because of the close monitoring of all pupils' progress, which is a routine part of leaders' and teachers' work. Consequently, pupils make the progress expected of them. The school's own information evidences that differences are diminishing between these pupils' progress in writing, reading and mathematics and that of others who have similar starting points. The evidence I was able to collect through lesson observations and looking at pupils' books confirms this. You agree though, that there is more work to do to make the further improvements required.
- Leaders have applied a wide range of actions to improve attendance, including home visits, the work of an educational welfare officer and rewards and

recognition for good attendance. Leaders have ensured that engagement with parents and carers has been an important feature of their work. Consequently, attendance has improved, and persistent absence has reduced significantly. School information confirms the impact of these actions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- reading across all years continues to improve so that pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 are at least in line with national averages for progress and attainment
- the progress and attainment of those pupils who are disadvantaged continue to improve, so that they match those of others nationally who have similar starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Barry Found
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher and a range of other school leaders to discuss the school's effectiveness. I visited classrooms with the headteacher to observe pupils' learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. I heard Year 1 and Year 2 pupils read, and I also looked at the quality of work in a range of pupils' books. I considered the 48 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View (including 44 free-text comments), 22 responses to the staff survey and 87 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I had meetings with groups of pupils to discuss their views about the school and spoke to pupils informally.

I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documents was examined, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement planning; information about pupils' progress; and various policies. I also examined the school's website.