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Alison Treadwell
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Dear Mrs Treadwell

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 November 2016, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Leaders and governors have fostered a strong sense of ambition and pride in the whole workforce. Staff feel that leaders encourage, challenge and support them to continually improve. The school's Catholic ethos underpins its work. Leaders and governors are committed to ensuring that everyone is helped and encouraged to achieve their very best. The positive culture of the school is reflected in the exemplary behaviour of the children.

The school's constant drive for improvement has resulted in improved outcomes for pupils, particularly at key stage 2. Provisional test results for 2016 in key stage 2 are above national levels. Pupils are well prepared for secondary school and speak very highly of the support they receive. One pupil commented, 'If I ever have a problem someone is there for me.' St Joseph's School is focused on developing the whole child. Staff want pupils to achieve well and feel cared for.

Since the last inspection, leaders have provided training for staff to address the identified areas for improvement. For example, the curriculum has been redesigned with exciting themes to ensure that pupils are enthused and engaged. Work in displays around the school demonstrates the breadth of the new curriculum. Themes include 'Peace and Reconciliation' and 'Birmingham'. Pupils in key stage 1

have created very imaginative skylines that celebrate the landmarks in their city. Leaders' monitoring evidences that teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently. Pupils are encouraged to respond to the feedback that they are given and have a better understanding of how they can improve. New assessment and tracking systems ensure that teachers have a good understanding of the progress of different groups of pupils. This information is also used by leaders to monitor and respond to any differences in achievement. Pupils that underachieve are provided with support to help them catch up.

Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check have improved and are now above national levels. This is as a result of effective staff training that is revisited annually. However, outcomes in key stage 1, though improving, are not yet in line with national levels. Fewer pupils reach the expected standard and achieve at a greater depth in reading and mathematics. The school's own assessment information shows that pupils' progress in key stage 1 was not as rapid as in key stage 2 during the last academic year.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has developed a culture of safeguarding. The school has established a safeguarding team that meets weekly to discuss any concerns and ensure that prompt action is taken. Pupils that I spoke to know this team well. One pupil commented, 'I like the safeguarding team; it lets us know that people care.' The team knows individual families well and is quick to engage outside agencies to provide any additional support that is required. This inter-agency work is a strength of the school.

Staff and governors have received specific training to help them prevent any form of radicalisation or extremism. Detailed records are kept of attendance at training events. Leaders have responded quickly to new statutory guidance and governors are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Inspection findings

- The school's good level of development in the early years foundation stage rose again last year and any differences between groups have diminished over time. The early years has been remodelled to improve the learning environment. Governors have also recruited new staff with experience in the early years, to further improve rates of progress in the Reception Year.
- Phonics is taught well across the school. Teachers and teaching assistants demonstrate strong subject knowledge. Pupils' skills are regularly reviewed so that they can be quickly moved on to learning new sounds when they are ready. A high proportion of pupils passed the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2016.
- The school's assessment information shows that rates of progress in key stage 1, particularly in reading, were not as rapid as those found in key stage 2 last year. I heard pupils read in Year 2 and observed the teaching of guided reading across key stage 2. Some pupils find the texts that they read quite easy and have the skills to access books that are more challenging.

- In observations of the teaching of reading in Year 6, teachers used questioning to skilfully challenge pupils. Pupils immerse themselves in a range of novels by different authors and show high levels of interest in their learning. When they come across a new word that they do not understand, nominated peers in 'dictionary corner' flick through dictionaries to check for meaning.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding effectively to ensure that any disadvantaged pupils make rates of progress that are similar to those of other pupils.
- Overall attendance rates are in line with national levels. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and girls who are regularly absent from school remains higher than national levels. The attendance of a small group of individuals and families is tracked very carefully and leaders are offering appropriate levels of support to ensure that attendance is improving. The school is aware that its work to continually improve rates of attendance must be maintained.
- The most able pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, generally make strong rates of progress over time. However, some most-able pupils did not attain at the higher level in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2016. Leaders are adapting the school's assessment systems further, and have already hosted moderation activities with other schools, to enhance the support and challenge they are able to offer to most-able pupils currently on roll.
- Governors have a thorough understanding of the school's improvement journey over time. Newly appointed governors enhance the governing body through their professional experience and skills. Governors have increased the level of support and challenge they are able to offer to leaders. Governors have carefully planned staff recruitment to ensure that the school has strong leaders who are highly supportive of one another and committed to securing further improvements. As a result, outcomes continue to improve across the school.
- The school is a member of Caritas Christi in Urbe ('the love of Christ in the city'), a group of 11 Catholic educational settings in the West Midlands. This collaboration has provided a range of training opportunities for staff including 'peer reviews' where leaders share their skills and identify strengths and areas for development in one another's schools. Monitoring records and assessment information demonstrate that the training being provided is continuing to improve the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The local authority has worked with the school to broker partnerships with other settings. St Joseph's supports other schools locally, developing standards in reading. The school improvement adviser has provided support to the school over the last two years. This support has included the monitoring of teaching and advising on the school's approach to the use of assessment information. The support has effectively improved provision at St Joseph's.

Next steps for the school

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that pupils, particularly in key stage 1, are sufficiently challenged so that rates of progress and attainment are consistent across the school and continue to rise.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with the leadership team to discuss the school's self-evaluation and development plan. We devised key lines of enquiry to focus inspection activities. The key lines of enquiry included: the extent to which the school has created a culture of safeguarding; the teaching of phonics and reading across key stages 1 and 2; and how well most-able pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, are supported to achieve at the highest level.

A learning walk was conducted across key stage 1 to observe the teaching of phonics. I heard pupils read in Year 2 and reviewed the reading books and logs that pupils share at home. In key stage 2, we jointly visited lessons in Years 3, 4 and 6 to observe guided reading. During observations, I spoke to pupils about their learning and explored the extent to which they are taught how to stay safe. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body.

I scrutinised a range of documentation including: the school's single central record; personnel files; child protection files; risk assessments; performance management information; details of pupil premium expenditure; assessment information; and curriculum plans.

I spoke with the school's local authority adviser via the telephone and met with the adviser from Caritas Christi in Urbe. I met with parents at the school gate after school. There were no responses to the pupil survey and insufficient responses on Parent View to generate feedback from families. I reviewed the 88 responses to the school's internal parent questionnaire which was conducted in October 2016.