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Mr Jonathan White
Headteacher
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Dear Mr White

Short inspection of Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018, 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 2014.

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 a number of significant changes since the previous inspection. You took up your post as headteacher in September 2017. You have quickly developed an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school. You have wasted no time in ensuring that the issues highlighted in the previous inspection report are being addressed. You have precise school improvement plans to continue raising pupils' achievement, particularly of those pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are most able. The impact of new leadership on accelerating pupils' progress is very evident, especially in early years.

Provision in the Nursery class is strong. Individual needs are carefully met. Children are happy, settled and confident in their well-resourced environment. Adults use precise and often technical vocabulary, which is helping children develop their speaking skills effectively and accurately. Children are making good progress in the Nursery class from their individual starting points.

Pupils have a clear love of learning and are diligent in class, trying their best to complete their activities. Pupils speak confidently about their learning and the subjects they enjoy, especially mathematics. They appreciate the changes that have been made over this year and value the new resources they have that help them make better progress. Pupils demonstrate a maturity that is often beyond their years when discussing friendship issues and how best to keep good friends. They show a respect for adults and each other alike.

Parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, overwhelmingly agreed that their children are happy, well looked after and safe. One parent confirmed the view of others, saying: 'Our children are very happy. Behaviour and learning standards are good, which is great. We are very pleased with the school.'

Pupils' attendance remains in line with the national average, and persistent absenteeism is lower than that found nationally. You work carefully with parents to support families in your community who require additional pastoral care. A strong feature of your school is the caring ethos, which reflects the values you promote within the community.

Governors are dedicated and committed to the school's ongoing success. Under the leadership of the experienced chair of governors, they visit the school regularly to check the standards of behaviour and the quality of education provided for pupils. They have an accurate view of strengths and areas for further improvement, as a result. They work effectively with you and other leaders, together with the local authority, to ensure that school improvement is rapid, sustained and focused on pupils achieving as well as they should. They recognise, however, that information regarding the curriculum on the website has not been updated in line with current statutory guidance.

You are fully aware of the areas that require further improvement so that pupils make better and more consistent progress across key stage 2. To achieve this aim, you provide staff with additional, good-quality training and development to improve their own skills. Staff value the way in which you take into account their workload when making decisions and implementing changes. All staff who responded to their questionnaire stated that they were proud to be working at the school and enjoyed it.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have been successful in creating a safe and caring environment in which most pupils and staff have confidence and feel valued. You have ensured that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

You have rigorous and effective systems in place to promote the safeguarding of the pupils in your care. You ensure that staff are well trained and that safeguarding policies and practices are fit for purpose. Staff, through their questionnaire, commented positively on the time you provide for them to read and understand policies and procedures.

Pupils spoken with, and all those who offered their views on the pupil questionnaire, stated that they feel safe at school. Pupils have an accurate understanding of bullying, and most are confident that adults deal well with situations if they are worried or concerned. Pupils regularly learn about how to keep safe when using online technology through the curriculum you provide.

You have ensured that there are suitable recording systems in place for the recruitment of staff and that all checks are rigorously completed. Governors

regularly check that the necessary recruitment checks on adults working at the school have been carried out effectively. Governors have valued the advice and guidance provided by the local authority in ensuring that the school's safeguarding systems are robust and in good order.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed a number of lines of enquiry that I would consider to determine whether the school remained good. My first line of enquiry was to evaluate how well children achieve in the early years classes. This is because, since the previous inspection, the proportion of children who have achieved a good level of development has been below that found nationally.
- Leadership in the early years has changed this academic year. There is a robust action plan in place to improve the provision and ensure that children make better progress from their broadly typical starting points. You are receiving additional advice and support from the local authority, which is hastening the pace of change in the early years. The outside learning area has been revamped and there is a greater focus on all adults interacting effectively with children. Consequently, more children are developing their skills quickly across all areas of learning.
- Children persevere well with the many activities provided both inside and outside the classes. They spend significant periods of time concentrating and using their knowledge and skills so that they are successful. For example, one child was designing her own map from careful observations of a globe on the table. She meticulously chose colours and demonstrated precision and determination to draw an accurate representation of the sea and land. She was delighted with the result. There were many other examples of children's individual perseverance and success in learning that we saw together over the course of the day.
- We agreed that although adults are observing children's learning and recording their findings in the learning journeys, there is not a consistency in their approach. Adult observations are not coordinated as well as they could be. Neither do they build on adults' prior understanding of what each child can already do and how individual children are helped to make even better progress in reading, writing and mathematics in particular. Consequently, some children, especially those who are most able, are not demonstrating the progress they should.
- I considered the quality of teaching in phonics as a line of enquiry. This was because the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in their Year 1 phonics screening check has been too inconsistent since the previous inspection and was below the national average in 2017.
- Raising the consistency of expectation and quality of teaching in phonics have been areas you have identified in your school improvement plan this year. Training is under way for staff, and additional lessons and support are precisely given to pupils who still need to pass their screening check in Year 2.
- In class, pupils use their knowledge of sounds well to spell increasingly difficult words, and this continues throughout the school. However, you recognise that

the opportunities to extend learning further are not developed sufficiently well. At times, some pupils repeat work that they are already familiar with and this slows the progress that they can make. Additional adults are not always used precisely enough in lessons so that even more pupils can achieve as well as possible.

- Another line of enquiry I considered was how well the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress across key stage 2. This was because the proportion who reached the required standard in key stage 2 had been lower in mathematics for the previous two academic years. No disadvantaged pupil reached the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined in 2017 by the end of key stage 2.
- From the range of books that we looked at, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are currently making similar progress to that of other pupils. In subjects such as science, these pupils are provided with the same opportunities to excel. Results demonstrate that at the end of key stage 2 the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in science is similar for all groups.
- You have improved the effectiveness with which additional funds are allocated. Governors are more involved in checking the use of funds to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the support and guidance they need. Consequently, more disadvantaged pupils on roll are starting to reach both the required standard and the higher standard.
- The final line of enquiry was to consider the consistency and quality of teaching in lower key stage 2. Pupils' progress over time had been broadly in line with that of others from the same starting points. I wanted to confirm that pupils continue to make good progress from key stage 1 in lower key stage 2.
- Pupils' books in Year 4 show that pupils, irrespective of prior ability, work diligently and well, not only in English and mathematics but also in history, religious education and science. Pupils, including those who are most able, are producing their best work. The standards of written work and high expectations were similar across all subjects. We found that adults use the school's feedback and marking policy well across subjects, and pupils are responding carefully to the feedback they are given. Pupils are making stronger and more consistent progress as a result.
- However, you have already highlighted that the standard of teaching over time in lower key stage 2 varies and inconsistencies remain. Examples of pupils editing and improving their work in Year 3 were less evident. Your systematic approach to analysing pupils' progress and holding staff more fully to account for the progress pupils make is starting to see some success. Your subject leaders are working effectively to ensure that all pupils make more consistent progress across all year groups.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of children who reach a good level of development in Reception increases so that it is at least in line with the national average consistently across the areas of learning
- adults use assessment information precisely to ensure that children in the early years make good progress from individual starting points
- the proportion of children who reach the required standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1 increases and is more consistently in line with the national average
- the quality and consistency of teaching in lower key stage 2 continues to improve so that all groups of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, make consistently good progress across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the early years leader, the leaders for mathematics and English, the school business manager and three representatives of the governing body.
- We jointly observed teaching and learning in classes across early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Together we evaluated pupils' current work across all subjects and a wide range of abilities.
- I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for continued improvement, documents relating to behaviour and reports from local authority visits.
- I spoke informally with pupils during lessons to consider their views. I also took account of 12 pupil responses to their online questionnaire.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff.
- I took account of the 81 parent responses that were provided during the inspection time to the online survey, Parent View, together with 27 free-text comments.
- The views of staff were considered from 30 responses to the staff online questionnaire.