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20 December 2016

Miss Teresa Cotter
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Cotter

Short Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

This is an ambitious school with a strong focus on maintaining a Catholic ethos and strengthening the curriculum. Since your appointment, you have led improvements to the educational provision at the school, such as more accurate assessment and better pupil outcomes by the end of Year 6. You and your staff are committed to further improvement of the education provided for all pupils. Particular developments since the inspection of the predecessor school include improved mathematics results and better provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Since the previous inspection, the school has become an academy and is now part of a multi-academy company made up of four Catholic schools.

Leaders have taken on board national changes to assessment and the curriculum and, as a result, the overall impact of teaching, learning and assessment has improved pupils' outcomes. The senior leadership team has been expanded and strengthened. You, the vice-principal and other senior leaders demonstrate the capacity to lead further improvements. Better deployment and use of teaching assistants have helped to improve the support provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 6 have been in line with or above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics for the past four years. The progress of the very small number of disadvantaged

pupils has improved, especially in mathematics, to be typically equal to that of other pupils, both in the school and those nationally. The most able disadvantaged pupils achieve in line with other most-able pupils in the school. Other most-able pupils progress well in key stage 2, especially in reading and mathematics. The most able pupils in key stage 1 do not make the progress they are capable of in reading, writing and mathematics.

The exciting and creative curriculum enables pupils to enjoy a wide range of activities, trips and visitors to the school. Leaders have ensured that the pupils receive typically effective teaching across the curriculum, and recognise there are areas where the provision can further improve. The inclusivity of the curriculum has been improved, along with pupils' awareness of equalities and global issues by becoming a UNICEF 'rights respecting school'. The range of extra-curricular clubs is broad, varied and appreciated by pupils and parents.

Safeguarding is effective

The culture of safeguarding in the school is robust. All checks on staff, volunteers, academy committee representatives and visitors are completed thoroughly and records are regularly checked by the chair of the academy committee. Staff training is up to date and includes preventing extremism and radicalisation in education. Any staff that join mid-year are provided with safeguarding training as part of their induction before they start working at the school. Leaders and academy committee representatives are fully aware of their duties to ensure that pupils and young children are kept safe. Visitors who do not have a current disclosure and barring service check are given a red lanyard to wear to alert other staff and are escorted during their visit. Leaders also ensure that the curriculum includes regular and appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn about dangers to be aware of and how to keep safe.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have ensured that the educational provision at the school has continued to develop and the areas of improvement from the inspection of the predecessor school have been successfully addressed. Staff work closely with staff from other schools in the multi-academy company, for example to provide joint training and check the accuracy of assessments of pupils' work. School development plans are comprehensive and focused on the correct areas of the school's provision which need to improve. Internal support and training have been used to improve teaching, learning and assessment and increase the rate of pupils' progress, especially in key stage 2. The most recent published assessment information for key stage 1 shows that some pupils do not make as much progress as they are capable of in reading, writing and mathematics. This is due to some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and not consistently challenging pupils enough.

- Leaders have made a number of changes to the curriculum, although some developments need further time to become fully embedded. A mathematics 'masterclass' has recently been introduced to improve the provision for the most able pupils. The most recent results show that pupils' progress in mathematics has improved in key stage 2, although it is not quite as strong in key stage 1.
- The majority of parents are very supportive of the school and the way their children are educated. When responding to Ofsted's survey, a minority of parents felt that the curriculum is not as balanced as it could be, as the focus on religion is too great. Although I did not find clear evidence of this, leaders should explore parents' views on this aspect when they work on improving the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment across the school.
- At the last inspection of the predecessor school, it was recommended that the school should improve pupils' attainment in mathematics, particularly for the most able pupils. This has been successfully accomplished in key stage 2, as the proportion of pupils achieving a greater depth at the end of Year 6 is significantly above the national average this year. Although most pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2, teaching does not enable the most able pupils to make the progress they are capable of in key stage 1. In addition, girls in key stage 1 do not make as much progress as boys in reading and writing at the expected level.
- Results from 2016 show that key stage 2 pupils made good progress in reading and mathematics, but less progress in writing. Work that pupils produce when they write unaided in their writing books demonstrates good progress in their writing skills, partly as a result of effective use of the school's marking and feedback policy. However, recent changes to this policy mean that it is not yet as effective or consistent as it could be in other books and subjects. Leaders are able to demonstrate an increased focus on improving pupils' writing skills, although it is too early to measure the impact of these changes.
- Children's outcomes at the end of Reception continue to be successful, as the proportion achieving a good level of development is consistently above the national average.
- Those responsible for governance know the school well and have helped to steer improvements, such as your appointment, and support the expansion of the senior leadership team. The effectiveness of governance has improved as both the academy committee and the board of directors have a greater awareness of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the school and the progress of groups across the school. Directors recently decided to undertake an external review of governance to ensure that their work is as effective as it could be, which demonstrates the desire to further improve. The review report is not yet available. The members of the academy committee are linked with subject leaders in the school and regularly visit to talk to pupils about their learning and monitor the progress of the actions to further improve the school.

- Pupils were observed engaging in purposeful learning activities across the school during the inspection. In the Reception class, the teacher was supporting a group of children to write about the things their senses can detect in autumn. Pupils in Year 1 were improving their phonics skills in groups, with appropriate support provided for those pupils who needed it. Most classes in key stage 2 were developing their grammar skills to support leaders' and teachers' drive to improve the progress of writing. Pupils' workbooks show that progress is evident, although rates of progress are not yet consistent enough across classes and some pupil groups. For example, there are some differences between the progress and outcomes for boys and girls in both key stages 1 and 2. Work was well presented in most of the pupils' books seen. Staff are currently focusing on improving pupils' spelling. However, leaders should ensure that there is still adequate attention paid to improving pupils' punctuation and handwriting skills.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are a strength of the school. The school's approach is to encourage the development of pupils' independent skills from an early age. As a result, their personal, social and emotional skills are well developed. Pupils enjoy school and say that other pupils behave well in lessons and around the school most of the time. Inspection evidence shows that staff manage behaviour well through the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum. Staff teach pupils about having high aspirations and the importance of respect for all others in the school, community and around the world.
- The majority of parents are very supportive of the school and positive about the education and support their children receive. Parents appreciate the more open approach of leaders and staff. They value the community feel that pervades the school and the after-school workshops for parents to help keep them informed about their child's education. Parents also rightly say that transition arrangements, both when children start school in Reception and leave at the end of Year 6, are very successful. A small number of parents feel that homework expectations are not always consistent and communication about term dates, for example, could be improved.
- Pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average for primary schools. Staff work closely with the families of individual pupils who have lower attendance, offering support when it is needed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment is further improved to increase the progress pupils make, especially in key stage 1, and to continue to reduce the variability in outcomes between boys and girls
- the most able pupils are consistently provided with opportunities to apply the skills they are taught to enable further progress, particularly in key stage 1 and writing in key stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Bellworthy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the vice-principal, other senior leaders and members of the academy committee and board of directors. The key lines of enquiry were pupils' progress in key stage 1, the progress of groups of pupils across the school, attendance and the impact of leaders and managers since the inspection of the predecessor school. Teaching and learning were observed in most classes across the school with senior leaders. Work in a sample of pupils' books was checked to establish the progress and quality of pupils' work over time. Informal discussions were held with pupils and parents to gauge their views on the school. Sixty-eight responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) were considered, along with 63 free text comments from parents. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes were observed around the school and at playtime. A wide range of documentation was also scrutinised, including the school's plans for improvement, external monitoring reports, records relating to attendance, safeguarding, records of checks made by leaders and the most recent outcomes.