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14 March 2017

Laura Flitton
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Dear Mrs Flitton

Short inspection of St John Fisher Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017, 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since becoming headteacher in September 2014, you have established a leadership and staff team with a strong capacity to secure further improvement. Your pragmatic and determined approach has been integral to the school's more recent and rapid development. Governors and other school leaders share your ambition for the school, and support you effectively to achieve the best for all pupils.

There has been a great deal of staff change since the previous inspection. Your evaluation of the school accurately identifies the strengths and the challenges that the school has had. You reflect carefully on how the school could do things more effectively and this provides the basis of leaders' school improvement work. Upon your appointment, you perceptively identified the areas that the school rapidly needed to develop and have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils' achievement is at the core of the school's work. This is ensuring that the school remains good.

Pupils are unanimous that they have a 'fun, educational experience'. Pupils say that they are proud of their school and 'feel heard'. Those pupils I met with from Year 6 said they will be sorry to leave in July because they think their time at St John Fisher has 'set them up for life'. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning.

They demonstrate good, positive learning attitudes that they maturely link to their learning for life skills. For example, they clearly explained what it means to fall into the 'learning pit'. Pupils said thinking about this image when you are stuck 'helps you to think about how to do things that challenge you, but this is in life too, not just in your school work'.

The previous inspection identified that the school needed to increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching. You have worked successfully, in partnership with the local authority, and with additional support from the Spiral Partnership Trust. While there is more to do to improve teaching, you have successfully maintained the effective teaching seen at the time of the last inspection, and achieved this through a period of change and turbulence in staffing. Teachers and subject leaders value the external support, as well as the high-quality guidance that you and your assistant headteachers provide.

Another area to develop from the previous inspection was to raise the achievement of all pupils, especially the most able. Together, alongside your two assistant headteachers, you have frequent meetings with teachers to discuss the learning of each pupil, including those pupils who are most able. Most-able pupils are given work that encourages them to apply their skills in order to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. These pupils talk enthusiastically about the 'amazing, fabulous or outstanding' levels of challenge they face in lessons. They said, 'The challenges are not easy because you have to think about what you have learned before and use it, sometimes in a different way.'

Outcomes in both key stage 1 and 2 in 2016 reflect the success of your work with the most able pupils. In key stage 1, the number of most able pupils who demonstrated a greater depth of learning in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. In key stage 2, the proportion of pupils who achieved the high standard for combined reading and mathematics results was above the national average. Additionally, those pupils achieving a high standard in writing was in line with the national average. This means that most able pupils, when leaving St John Fisher, are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Governors support and challenge the school effectively. This helps leaders to reflect on their work and contributes to successful school improvement. However, some governors do not maintain their strategic oversight and occasionally become too immersed in the operational working of the school. Leaders acknowledge that some of these activities are not appropriate for school governors and that this is an area for improvement.

Most parents have welcomed the changes that have taken place at the school and they share pupils' and staff's enthusiasm for the school's work and its future. One parent said, 'This school has made significant progress over the last couple years and will continue to do so.' Another parent encapsulated the views of others, saying, 'There is a wonderful atmosphere and community at St John Fisher, a nurturing environment which allows the children to grow at their own pace. Most

important of all, children are happy at school, love their teachers and are proud of their achievements. We couldn't ask for more than that!

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

A culture of safeguarding, safety and welfare is embedded throughout the school. You have reviewed the systems in place and have ensured that policy, practice and procedure meet all statutory requirements, including all required checks when recruiting staff. Leaders, along with the governing body, make sure that these arrangements are rigorous and are meticulously maintained. You ensure that all staff are well trained and understand their responsibilities for reporting concerns, which are carefully recorded and followed up scrupulously. All records are detailed, thorough and of high quality; this includes records relating to behaviour incidents and exclusions. Where necessary, leaders work diligently with external agencies to safeguard children's welfare. You have also made sure that all staff understand the government's 'Prevent' duty, intended to counter the risks of radicalisation. Effective training ensures that all staff have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of their accountability to safeguard and care for all pupils at St John Fisher.

All the pupils who spoke with me said that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have a worry or concern. They have an astute understanding of how to keep themselves safe both in and outside of school. Pupils told me that they think that behaviour in school has improved considerably. They explain that this is because of the introduction of the 'behaviour diamond' and the 'Behaviour Bees'. Pupils said that everyone knows the rules and follows them because they understand the consequences and do not want to lose their privileges. Pupils demonstrate an in-depth understanding of types of bullying, explaining that it is when there is 'intent to hurt'. They heed the messages from the 'internet safety days' and their lessons about e-safety.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry for this inspection was to focus on how leaders have sustained effective teaching and learning across the school. Upon your appointment, you very quickly reviewed the provision in the school and, as a priority, worked on ensuring that all new teachers to the school were effective. You and your leaders give good, timely and precise advice that helps teachers to improve. However, you have not been reticent about managing underperformance, and have a very accurate, realistic view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. You recognise the strengths in the teaching, but equally you are also aware that there are some inconsistencies. You know that more needs to be done to make sure that good practice is shared across the school so that teaching is unfailingly of the high quality you expect.

- Another line of enquiry explored during this inspection was about how pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified and if the provision in place sufficiently meets their varying needs.
- The special educational needs leader has worked hard to successfully implement effective systems and to work with external agencies and other specialists delivering services such as play therapy, speech and language therapy and behaviour support. Pupils' needs are identified precisely and plans are tightly focused around pupils' 'one-page profiles'. Parents are involved every step of the way and make regular contributions to pupils' targets. Teachers take ownership of these pupils and deploy teaching assistants to provide the right levels of support and challenge in small-group sessions and to individuals. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are now making good progress from their various starting points.
- An additional aspect considered during the inspection was how leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points. The small number of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress. A very small proportion of these pupils also have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You and the governors make sure that the funding you receive for disadvantaged pupils is spent wisely and is always focused on pupils' achievement and personal development. You regularly review the support in place for disadvantaged pupils and flexibly adapt the provision to accurately meet their needs.
- During the inspection, I focused on seeing if the progress that pupils make in both mathematics and writing is improving across the school. Prior to my visit, you and other leaders had already identified this as an urgent area to improve and have been working relentlessly to improve progress in reading and writing.
- Staff training and support in both of these areas is having a real impact and pupils' achievement in both mathematics and writing is improving across the school. An increasing proportion of pupils are working at age-related expectations for both mathematics and writing. This reflects improving rates of progress from pupils' starting points in all year groups.
- The final line of enquiry was linked to the attendance of your vulnerable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Focused work by school leaders is successfully reducing the number of persistent absences and ensuring that the most vulnerable pupils are in school every day. Pupils enjoy attending school and you work hard to make sure that parents understand the importance of sending their children to school every day. As a result, published attendance information in 2016 shows that the school's attendance is above the national average, and the rate of persistent absenteeism is below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they continue:

- to strengthen the strategic work of the governing body by ensuring that all

governors understand their role and apply this appropriately to how they monitor the school's performance

- to improve the teaching and learning further so that it contributes to quickening, even more, the progress pupils make, particularly in mathematics and writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the start of the inspection we agreed the key lines of enquiry to be explored during the inspection. I held discussions with you and the special educational needs leader, who is also the assistant headteacher, spoke to five governors, including the chair, and also met with a representative from the local authority. I visited all classrooms with you and we looked at a range of work in mathematics, writing and other curriculum subjects. I listened to some pupils read and talked to another group of pupils about school life. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding, exclusions and attendance information. I took account of the views expressed by 71 parents who completed the online questionnaire and their written comments, and the views of six members of staff, and the 48 pupils who returned a completed questionnaire.