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Robert della-Spina
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Dear Mr della-Spina

Short inspection of Holy Cross Primary Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

After taking up your post in January 2016, you soon gained the confidence of pupils, staff and parents. You acknowledged the many strengths of the school. You also quickly identified areas where leadership and teaching could be developed to make the school even more effective.

You have improved the quality of leadership throughout the school. Middle leaders told me how their roles have changed since your appointment. They have received helpful training to develop their leadership skills. They now undertake more frequent and rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and learning. Crucially, you hold them to account for the impact of their leadership on pupils' outcomes. Sharing leadership responsibilities throughout the staff means that Holy Cross is in a strong position to continue to improve.

You have also acted to promote better reading skills and to foster a love of reading among pupils. Since your appointment, the range and quality of books available in the classrooms and in the school library have improved greatly. Teachers hear pupils read more frequently and track carefully what they are reading. Pupils enjoy participating in the whole-school reading incentives. These encourage them to read widely.

The previous inspection asked the school to improve teaching so that more pupils made outstanding progress. Changes in staffing over the last five years have been a barrier to meeting this target. Even so, you have challenged weaker teaching and provided high-quality support for staff. This has ensured that teaching in all classes is now consistently good or better. Teachers are confident and ambitious for their pupils to do well. They assess accurately how much progress pupils are making and plan their lessons accordingly. Teachers are now providing suitably challenging work for the most able pupils. You agree, however, that teachers sometimes do not meet the needs of lower-attaining pupils successfully. As a result, these pupils sometimes struggle to complete the tasks they are set without considerable support from an adult.

Together with your colleagues and governors, you have made sure that the faith-based ethos of Holy Cross is at the heart of the school's work. Parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are almost unanimously full of praise for the school. As one parent wrote, 'The school is very loving and caring for the children. Teachers are passionate that children will succeed.'

Pupils' behaviour is impeccable in class and around the school. Pupils are very polite and friendly. They were eager to show me their work and clearly take great pride in their school. Pupils firmly believe that the school meets its values statement and that they are 'Loved, Valued and Challenged'.

We agreed on the areas where you should focus your attention to make the school even better. The proportion of pupils working at or above the expected standard in reading by the end of key stage 2 is not high enough. To tackle this, your current priority is to improve pupils' reading comprehension skills. In addition, boys in the Reception Year achieve consistently less than girls. The learning environment in the Reception class is unattractive. It lacks stimulating areas for children to explore ideas. The outdoor area, in particular, is untidy. Staff do not provide an exciting range of activities that take into account the different ways in which young children learn.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. The vast majority of parents responding to Parent View agree that their child is safe at school. A survey of staff confirms this view. Pupils said that they feel safe at school because they know that adults care deeply about their physical and emotional well-being. All staff have been trained in safeguarding and child protection. They report promptly any concerns they may have about pupils. The school keeps full records of issues that arise, the actions taken and the impact of these actions.

The governor with responsibility for safeguarding recently checked the school's safeguarding practices. The findings were positive and show the high priority the governing body gives to the pupils' welfare. Even so, I was told during the inspection that the school was not represented at a recent child protection case conference. On this occasion, communications with parents and external agencies

were not effective. You have assured me that the school's absence from this meeting was exceptional and that the matter will be followed up urgently with all relevant parties.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, pupils in Year 6 made slower progress than the national average in the national test in reading at the end of key stage 2. Many pupils struggled with questions that asked them to show that they fully understood what they had read. As a result, the school has changed the way it teaches reading. It now focuses more on key comprehension skills such as inference, prediction and summarising. These changes have been supported by high-quality training for staff from English specialists. It is too early to judge the impact of these actions on pupils' progress, however.
- By the end of the Reception Year, boys are not as well prepared as girls for Year 1. Boys typically achieve in line with the national average for boys. However, their achievement is nowhere near the consistently strong achievement of girls. The early years leader has identified that a lack of confidence among boys hinders their progress. She is making changes to overcome this barrier to learning. Improving boys' achievement by the end of the Reception Year remains a priority.
- In 2016, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 was below the national average in mathematics. Pupils who had reached the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of the Reception Year made slower progress than these pupils nationally. These results were a consequence of unsettled staffing which lowered the quality of teaching and learning. You have successfully resolved the staffing issues. Teaching is now effective throughout key stage 1. In 2017, pupils achieved well at the end of key stage 1. Their attainment was above the national averages in reading and writing. It was close to the national average in mathematics.
- Standards in the phonics screening check taken at the end of Year 1 have improved each year since 2014. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard has risen from 44% to 87% over that period. Teachers have learned much from effective practitioners in other schools. They have received high-quality professional development. Leaders have ensured that all staff appointed to work with this year group are able to teach phonics effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers focus on key comprehension skills to improve standards in reading at the end of key stage 2
- staff make the learning areas in the Reception class, both indoors and outdoors, more attractive and plan exciting learning opportunities for children
- adults focus on activities in the Reception class that boost the confidence of boys

so that more boys achieve a good level of development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the Pax Christi Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Nottingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Anthony O'Malley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and other members of staff to discuss the school's effectiveness. I held a discussion with three governors to learn their views of the school's performance and the governing body's role in securing school improvement. One of these, the chair of the governing body, is also a trustee of the Pax Christi Catholic Academy Trust and shared the trust's role. I also met formally with a group of pupils and spoke to others throughout the school day. Together we observed teaching and learning in all classes. During these visits to lessons, I looked at work in pupils' books in all subjects. I examined a range of school documentation. This included documents linked to keeping the pupils safe, the school's self-evaluation of its performance, the school improvement plan and performance management. I considered 46 responses to Parent View and 21 free-text comments left by parents. In addition, I took account of the views of 14 members of staff and 51 pupils provided through their questionnaires.