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Ms Maria Nowicka
Headteacher
St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Junior School
Linacre Road
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Dear Ms Nowicka

Short inspection of St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 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. You, along with your senior leaders, have high aspirations for all pupils. You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The actions that you have taken to secure improvements are having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. You are committed to developing the role of all leaders in the school. Year group leaders told me that they appreciate the training they have received, including coaching. Under your guidance, they have improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Governors understand their responsibilities well and have a breadth of knowledge and skills to draw on. They are actively involved in school life while also ensuring that they focus on their strategic roles. The governing body has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors systematically check that actions in the school improvement plan have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

Pupils are rightly proud of their school. Pupils' behaviour and the promotion of their welfare are strengths. Pupils are extremely polite, try hard and enjoy talking about their learning. They appreciate being able to use their own initiative, such as raising money for charity. You ensure that pupils' many different achievements are regularly celebrated. Pupils told me that they would be surprised if anyone was bullied in the school, and pupils show inclusive attitudes towards each other.

All parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that their

children are happy at school, safe and well looked after. I received many positive comments from parents. Typical of many, one parent said that their child is 'flourishing in a well-disciplined, caring environment'. Another said that their child is challenged and supported to become a 'good, well-rounded, educated person', reflecting the views of other parents. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding and know families well. You and senior leaders are aware of specific issues within your community and tackle these with pupils. You ensure that parents are aware of risks, including unsafe use of social media. Leaders with specific responsibility for safeguarding have clear systems in place to monitor concerns and act quickly if any issues arise. Staff are well informed about all aspects of safeguarding and know what to do if they have a concern. They receive regular training and appreciate the regular updates that they receive from leaders. Governors have a clear understanding of their duties to safeguard pupils. For example, they visit the school regularly to check that all the necessary recruitment procedures are carried out.

Pupils said that they feel safe and know who to talk to if they had a concern. Pupils told me that they appreciate the guidance that they have received from a national safeguarding charity and the local police. They are knowledgeable about a range of topics, including e-safety and risks from involvement in gangs, and know how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- For the first line of enquiry, I looked at how effectively leaders ensure that pupils are sufficiently challenged in reading, particularly younger pupils. I chose this because reading outcomes are not as strong as outcomes in writing. In addition, for the last two years, progress for the higher attainers in reading was not as strong as for other pupils in the school. You and your leaders have established strong communication and transition procedures with the infant school. This ensures that pupils progress well from the time they join the school in Year 3. It also means that those pupils who would benefit from extra support are identified early. For example, pupils who join Year 3 with low attainment in phonics receive targeted phonics teaching to ensure that they catch up.
- In guided reading, teachers ensure that pupils read texts that are challenging. Teachers select texts that appeal to pupils because they relate to what pupils learn in a range of curriculum subjects. Teachers make sure that pupils understand and use a range of challenging vocabulary. For example, pupils in Year 3 confidently read and explained to me the meaning of words such as 'erupted' and 'distracted'. Teaching assistants effectively support pupils' reading accuracy and comprehension.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to reading. They demonstrate a love of books and enjoy reading. Pupils said that they appreciate the availability of a wide range of more challenging and engaging texts. Pupils understand how books are classified

by difficulty, which supports them to choose a book for themselves that has the correct amount of challenge. You encourage parents to read regularly with their children at home. Leaders have provided parents with guidance on effective questions to ask to support their children's understanding of what they read. This is having a positive impact on strengthening pupils' comprehension skills.

- You and senior leaders monitor the progress and attainment of pupils regularly to ensure that any pupils falling behind are supported to catch up. As a result of your actions, pupils are developing accuracy, fluency and understanding in reading. Across the school, pupils are making good progress from their different starting points. This includes the most able pupils, and a high proportion attain at the higher standard.
- For the second key line enquiry, I evaluated the extent to which you and your leaders are ensuring that pupils, particularly girls, are sufficiently challenged in mathematics. This was because, although pupils' progress is broadly average over time, the proportion of pupils attaining at the expected and at the high standard in Year 6 has declined over the last three years. In 2017, girls' progress was not as strong as that of boys.
- You and senior leaders have established a more structured approach to the teaching of mathematics than in the past. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts. Pupils apply their understanding of calculation methods and mathematical concepts effectively to solve problems. However, work in pupils' books and visits to classrooms indicate that pupils would benefit from more opportunities to reason mathematically to stretch their thinking.
- Work in pupils' books shows that teachers pick up and address pupils' errors. Equally, teachers know when pupils are ready for more demanding work and move them on to this as soon as they are ready. Teaching assistants routinely support pupils' understanding in mathematics and their application of skills.
- Pupils told me that learning in mathematics is 'tricky' and 'fun'. Boys and girls both showed positive attitudes to learning, and current assessment information indicates that the progress of boys and girls is equally strong. As a result of your actions, pupils make good progress in mathematics. However, the progress of disadvantaged pupils in some year groups is not as strong as that of their peers.
- For the final key line of enquiry, I explored how effectively leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils improve their skills in punctuation, grammar and spelling. Pupils' progress and attainment in writing have been strong for the last two years. However, disadvantaged pupils' attainment in the key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling test was below the national average in 2017.
- You and senior leaders have developed a highly successful, structured approach to the teaching of writing. You have ensured that work is engaging and appeals to pupils' interests. For example, pupils have enjoyed writing newspaper reports about an alien invasion and letters addressed to the prime minister about reducing incidents of cyber bullying.
- Pupils told me that they learn about different aspects of spelling, punctuation and grammar when they analyse different types of texts. Teachers check that pupils

know what to do to improve the quality of their own writing, including using grammar and punctuation accurately. Pupils see improving their progress in spelling as a priority. They are diligent at learning their weekly spellings and correcting any mistakes they make in their work.

- As a result of your actions, pupils from different starting points are making strong progress in their ability to produce high-quality pieces of writing. Pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, make good progress in their spelling accuracy and use an ever-increasing range of punctuation and grammatical structures. You are successfully diminishing the difference between the outcomes of pupils that are disadvantaged and those of their peers in school in these aspects of writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of mathematics encourages the development of pupils' reasoning skills
- in mathematics, disadvantaged pupils make substantial progress over time, so a greater proportion attain the standard expected for their age.

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 Brent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Morrison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you, and senior leaders. I met with year group leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative from Brent schools' partnership. I considered the views of parents, pupils and staff, including written comments made to Ofsted. You accompanied me on visits to classrooms. I talked to pupils about their learning. I looked at pupils' books and listened to pupils read. I also evaluated a range of school documentation, including the school's development plan, safeguarding records and information about current pupils' achievement and attendance.