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Mrs Joanne Hanslip
Principal
SS. Mary and John's Catholic Primary Academy
Caledonia Road
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Dear Mrs Hanslip

Short inspection of SS. Mary and John's Catholic Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 2019, 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 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You and senior leaders, including governors, have managed significant staffing changes since the previous inspection. For a period of time, you were appointed as executive headteacher within the multi-academy company (MAC) and provided support to other schools across the MAC. You returned to SS. Mary and John's as the principal. New subject leaders have been appointed. During this period, new and temporary staff joined the school. The lack of continuity in staffing has led to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and slowed progress towards addressing some of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

You and your senior leaders share a passion and a determination that all pupils will thrive and achieve their full potential. You know the school well. Your evaluation of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve is accurate. With your leadership team and the support of the school improvement adviser and governors, you are taking action to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

You have driven improvements in reading so that, by the end of key stage 2, pupils make strong progress. You have concentrated on expanding pupils' vocabulary through activities such as word of the week and through the introduction of chosen texts to support pupils' understanding. At the last inspection, leaders were asked to

ensure that pupils developed their inference and deduction skills when reading. This focus remains a priority within the school's ongoing improvement work.

At the last inspection, pupils' spelling ability was identified as holding back their achievement in writing. You have invested in a spelling scheme to support pupils in becoming more accurate and confident in spelling familiar and unfamiliar words. Teachers' expectations of pupils' independent spelling have been raised through your focus on improving the quality of the teaching of writing. The teaching of spelling has improved but many pupils do not use these skills effectively in their own writing. This remains a priority for improvement within subject action plans.

The promotion of a Christian ethos underpins your work, and the school values are evident in the care and respect pupils demonstrate towards one another. The previous inspection report identified that the behaviour of pupils was exemplary, and this is still evident. Pupils are cheerful, thoughtful and polite. Pupils enjoy learning and say that teachers are kind, helpful and supportive. There is no disruption to learning through poor behaviour.

Staff are committed to seeing the school improve and they are proud to work at SS. Mary and John's. They value the opportunities for training and appreciate the coaching and mentoring provided to develop their skills further. For example, the peer-to-peer coaching in mathematics deepens the knowledge and understanding of staff teaching the school's new mathematics curriculum. All staff share the vision for a school where pupils thrive and reach their full potential.

Very few parents and carers responded to Parent View. However, the parents that I spoke to during the inspection commented positively about the approachability of all staff, and the good communication which is in place. Parents appreciate your leadership and all that staff do to support their children.

The school provides comprehensive support to families to encourage them to get their children to school. Pastoral support is a strength of the school. Many pupils join the school part way through the year but settle in quickly because they are welcomed and supported by staff and pupils. One parent reflected the views of many by saying, 'The school has a good moral level and the principal is well thought of.'

Governors are well informed. They visit the school regularly and individual governors regularly report back to the governing body on their findings. The chair of governors places a high priority on seeing teaching and learning take place at first hand. Governors take their monitoring role seriously and have an accurate view of the school. You and senior leaders benefit from sharing expertise across the MAC and the redeployment of staff to provide additional support in raising standards.

The school improvement adviser commissioned to work with the school has an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. The adviser has helped to guide the school sensitively through recent changes and is aware of the areas that need improving.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is an effective culture of safeguarding within the school. The MAC ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Regular monitoring and training for all staff ensure that practice is up to date and effective. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil. Designated safeguarding leaders ensure that referrals are made promptly and appropriate actions are followed up.

Pupils know how to stay safe online and know 'not to reply if someone you don't know speaks to you online'. Pupils are clear that there is no bullying in school. Pupils gave the example of a playground motto, 'Make up, not give up', to highlight the school's approach to promoting a harmonious environment.

Inspection findings

- We focused on the combined outcomes for reading, writing and mathematics in key stages 1 and 2 and the actions leaders have taken to raise attainment in these subjects for pupils. You highlighted writing as the key factor in limiting current attainment. You have invested in a new assessment system and now have an accurate view of achievement for individuals and groups of pupils across the school. School leaders use this information well to provide additional support through increased staffing in order to provide effective tuition to improve outcomes in all three subjects.
- Improving outcomes in reading has been a key focus for improvement over the past year. Training in effective practice in guided reading to ensure that pupils understand what they have read, the purchase of new reading books and a focus on expanding vocabulary have enabled pupils in key stage 2 to make strong progress.
- Staff turbulence has led to a lack of continuity and a decline in standards in some classes. Together with your leadership team, you have identified the training necessary to ensure a consistent approach to teaching and learning across the school. New ways of working are being introduced and embedded. Leaders support staff to improve their teaching. As a result, progress is now improving.
- Improving the teaching of mathematics has been one of your key priorities since the previous inspection. You have purchased a new whole-school mathematics scheme and the mathematics leader has created a comprehensive calculation policy to provide clear guidance for staff to follow. This clear guidance, new resources and a range of effective strategies to provide challenge for the most able pupils are resulting in stronger progress for all pupils.
- You have put in place regular monitoring and have provided training and support, particularly for new members of staff who are unfamiliar with the mathematics scheme. This is helping to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics across the school.
- Some errors in calculation are not being addressed. Guidance provided by the calculation policy or the newly implemented scheme of work is not consistently followed. Pupils do not readily have access to the concrete apparatus they need

in order to develop a secure understanding of mathematics. This limits the progress that pupils make.

- Pupils' attainment in writing in key stages 1 and 2 has been below that seen nationally for the past two years. You appointed a new leader to take on the responsibility of leading English across the school and, working together, have identified areas to improve. Monitoring, including work scrutiny, has highlighted that pupils do not use the skills they are taught through discrete grammar, punctuation and spelling sessions in their writing. There were also significant variations in teachers' approaches to supporting pupils in editing their own work. You have identified the need to have a whole-school approach to the teaching of writing, with clear expectations for each year group, so that pupils can build on their writing skills effectively as they move through the school.
- You have introduced a handwriting scheme across the school. Together with your leadership team, you have identified actions for all teachers to take in order to improve the presentation and quality of pupils' handwriting. Your regular monitoring has identified the lack of consistency in the teaching of handwriting and that some teachers are not taking positive action to follow school policy.
- During the inspection, it was noted that the presentation of work in books is not consistent across classes. Teachers' expectations of presentation and layout are not clear, resulting in some untidy presentation in English and mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a consistent approach to the teaching of writing is developed and securely embedded across the school
- the teaching of handwriting improves so that pupils' handwriting develops well over time
- teachers support pupils to apply their spelling skills effectively in their writing in a range of subjects
- the guidance provided in the school's calculation policy is followed consistently by all members of staff
- pupils use available resources as appropriate to develop a deeper understanding of mathematics.

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

directors and the Catholic senior executive leader of the MAC, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Blackburn
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Before the inspection, I looked at a range of information, including the previous inspection report, assessment information and the school's website. I scrutinised several documents, including your self-evaluation, your school development plan and school policies.

At the start of the inspection, we agreed the areas of focus and the timetable for the day.

During the inspection, I visited lessons with you, along with the assistant principal, and we discussed our observations. We met to discuss current assessment and monitoring information. We also reviewed documentation relating to safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.

I met with a group of governors from the Bishop Cleary Multi-Academy Company, including the chief operating officer, the Catholic senior executive leader and the chair of governors. I spoke to parents as they dropped their children off in the morning. I also took account of the response of one parent to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

I spoke to pupils during lessons, as well as listening to a group of pupils. I took account of four responses to the staff survey.