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Mrs Louise Bury
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bury

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 March 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders have set out a clear vision for the school to sit at the heart of its community as a positive force for pupils and their families, supporting them in their faith, their well-being and their academic achievement. Your energetic pursuit of this ambition is infectious. As a result, staff are proud to work at the school. They are reflective and seek to be the best they can be for the benefit of pupils.

Pupils are happy, confident learners who work very hard in lessons. They get on well with one another and are friendly towards adults. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in high levels of attendance and the positive comments received via the online survey of pupils' views. This picture is echoed by the views of most parents spoken to and those who commented in the Parent View questionnaire.

Relentless pursuit of improvement is a key characteristic of St Joseph's School. Leaders are continuously looking with a questioning eye at how things are done, seizing any opportunity to tweak or refine a policy or procedure to make it just that little bit better. Nothing is allowed to stand still. For example, despite tackling the areas for improvement from the last inspection swiftly and systematically, leaders have continued checking the impact and making additional changes so as to make even more difference to pupils' learning. This is shown in your plans to renew the focus on providing greater challenge for the most able pupils next year.

Leaders maintain the tricky balance between making changes and giving staff time to implement new ideas effectively. This is why the standard of education has been sustained in the context of a rapidly growing and changing school. Leaders, including governors, believe that it was crucial for them to maintain the family ethos of the school as it gets larger. Parents confirm that this has been done successfully.

Leaders strongly believe that staff development is key to the school's success and have invested substantially in training, support and guidance. This has helped teachers continuously refine their practice and has ensured that outcomes for pupils remain good and are set to improve further.

The early years provision is very well led. The Nursery (known to parents as 'pre-school') and Reception classes work cohesively as a unit, helping children to settle very well into school life and get off to a strong start in their learning. Reception staff tailor the way they work so that it aligns with the requirements of key stage 1, effectively preparing children for the transition to Year 1.

Subject leaders are increasingly effective and are making a difference to outcomes in their subjects. They support senior leaders well in gathering evidence about the quality of teaching. For example, subject leaders scrutinise teachers' planning and pupils' books. They provide helpful advice to sharpen up teachers' subject knowledge and to increase their confidence. They use the information they are given by senior leaders about data to drive the focus of their work. However, subject leaders are at an early stage of analysing and interpreting assessment information so as to identify for themselves the improvement priorities for their subject. Training to help them to do this is scheduled.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a very strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Robust policies and processes are rigorously applied. As with all the school's work, opportunities to strengthen these further are continuously sought and acted upon. Staff are highly trained in child protection and are kept well informed about current developments in safeguarding.

Concerns about pupils' welfare are dealt with swiftly, efficiently and vigilantly. Records are thorough. Relevant information is shared with key school staff and outside agencies to ensure that no bit of the jigsaw is missed when it comes to child protection. Investment in the school site has made it secure. All activities are thoroughly assessed for potential risk and action is quickly taken to make them as safe as possible.

Inspection findings

- When children join the Nursery (pre-school) and Reception classes, many struggle to communicate their needs, or to manage their feelings as well as many children of similar ages. A growing number do not speak English as their first language, which can make it even more difficult for them to settle into school. Staff work closely with parents to build a picture of what children can and cannot do. Teachers and teaching assistants keep a close check on how well children are progressing, adapting teaching as necessary. As a result, children settle in quickly, enjoy the activities on offer and begin to acquire the skills they will need for successful learning.
- Teachers in the Reception classes spend much time helping children to develop early reading, writing and mathematical skills. As a result, most children are ready for the demands of the national curriculum by the time they start Year 1. The proportion who are working at this standard is similar to that in the majority of schools.
- Improving pupils' writing across the school was a key focus last year. As a result of the effective action taken, pupils are using a better range of spelling, grammar and punctuation in their writing. Presentation has improved and pupils are using a more fluent style of handwriting.
- This year, leaders have identified mathematics as the main focus for improvement. A new approach to teaching the subject is being implemented, initially in the Year 2 classes. The subject leader has a plan in place to extend this to all classes by the end of the summer term. Early signs that this will benefit pupils are very positive. Pupils in Year 2 are beginning to apply their number knowledge more confidently to challenging mathematical questions.
- Nevertheless, there is still work to be done. For example, the subject leader has identified that girls are less confident than boys in explaining their thinking and mathematical reasoning. In addition, pupils' books show that some of the most able are not challenged enough in mathematics lessons. They sometimes spend time repeating work they can already do. This slows down the development of their mathematical understanding.
- Leaders have sensitively and successfully kept a strong focus on building pupils' confidence and improving their attitudes to learning at the same time as managing the rapid growth of the school. Most year groups have gone from one to two classes. Nevertheless, the needs of individual pupils are central to leaders' priorities.
- The leadership team has increased in number, reflecting the changing structure of the school. Subject leaders are successfully taking more responsibility for checking and improving the quality of teaching. Training is scheduled soon to help subject leaders use assessment information from across the school. This will help them identify strengths and weaknesses in English and mathematics, so that they can take full responsibility for driving improvement in these areas.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the actions under way to improve outcomes for the most able pupils and girls, particularly in (but not limited to) mathematics, quickly lead to success
- subject leaders for English and mathematics make effective use of assessment information to identify and address improvement priorities in their subject.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with: the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher; other school staff; and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke informally to pupils in lessons. I spoke to several parents as they collected their children at the end of the school day. I looked at the 39 responses to the Parent View survey, the 21 responses to the pupil survey and the 22 questionnaires completed by staff. I visited lessons and looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding and child protection.