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Jan Cunningham
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cunningham

Short inspection of St Andrew the Apostle Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 2016, 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 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As headteacher, you provide strong direction in pursuing the vision that every pupil in your school should achieve success and, in doing so, grow in confidence and self-esteem. You are supported in this by a committed senior leadership team and staff who clearly work together very closely to achieve the school's aims. Together, you have succeeded in tackling the two areas of improvement identified in the last inspection report.

You have improved boys' performance in writing by reorganising your middle management team, so that one person has specific responsibility for developing the teaching of writing and another for improving reading. You have provided additional training for staff on how to stimulate boys' interests in writing and made the improvement of writing an objective for every member of staff. You have also invested in a wide range of new resources, including videos, films and computer programmes, to support this work. In one lesson, for example, pupils showed great interest when watching a film clip about a Greek myth. From there, they were going on to create and act out scenes based on this, in preparation for writing their own version of the myth. The displays around the school showed how pupils produced a wide range of different types of writing within each subject, ranging from newspaper reports in history to descriptions of experiments in science and explanations of how particular aspects of the physical world were formed in

geography. Through these approaches, you have succeeded in raising standards in writing, so that they are at least in line with the national average for all pupils, including boys, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs.

The second area for improvement in the last inspection report was to increase the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the higher levels of attainment in the national tests. In tackling this, you again provided specific training for teachers and teaching assistants to ensure that they were challenging the most able. You introduced individual learning plans, so that every child could focus on a particular aspect of work that she or he needed to improve. You also timetabled specific lessons on mental arithmetic, to increase each pupil's confidence, accuracy and speed in this area. In addition, you employed a peripatetic teacher to give extra support to pupils in Year 6. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in mathematics has increased each year and, in 2015, was well above the national average. Now that 'levels' are no longer used in assessing pupils, the mathematics leader has provided further training for colleagues to ensure that they know how to help each pupil to master specific aspects of the subject. Work in pupils' books shows that this is having a positive impact and that the improvements made over the last five years are set to continue.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have rigorous systems for checking on the suitability of staff to work with children. The school's child protection policy and procedures are appropriate and cover all the required areas, including combatting terrorism and dealing with suspected cases of female genital mutilation, forced marriage and trafficking. You have adopted the local authority's 'acceptable use' policy, to ensure that children are protected from harm when using the internet and social media.

During my visit, I spoke to the parents and grandparents of 15 pupils from across all year groups. They were unanimous in their praise of the school, describing it as 'really warm and welcoming', 'a happy school' and one where staff were 'very friendly' and 'very helpful' if they or their children had any problems. Of the 30 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, all but one would recommend the school to others. Without exception, they said that their children were well looked after and felt safe at school.

This positive feedback was echoed by the eight children, chosen at random from Years 3 to 6, to whom I spoke. They said that they enjoyed coming to school, felt safe there and also on the way to and from school. They were very enthusiastic about the bike safety and first-aid lessons they received. They knew whom to contact if they had any problems or worries and were confident that they would receive any help they needed. They knew how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media. They told me that mobile phones were not allowed in school and had to be handed in if they were brought. They said that there had been some bullying in the past but this had been dealt with very effectively. This

was borne out by the behaviour records that you showed me.

You and the learning mentor ensure that any pupils or families at risk of harm receive appropriate support and you have established strong links with relevant agencies outside the school.

Inspection findings

- As a result of frequent visits to classrooms and regular analysis of information about pupils' progress, you and your senior colleagues have a clear and accurate view of the strengths and the areas of development in teaching and learning within your school. Where necessary, you have provided additional support to staff who need to refine particular aspects of their work. Your records show that this has led to improvements.
- My visits to lessons and an examination of plans showed that your teachers match work very carefully to the needs of individual pupils, so that they make good progress. Teaching assistants play a crucial role in lessons and I saw instances where they helped pupils, who might otherwise have lacked confidence, to take a full and active part in class and group discussions. My examination of books showed that your marking policy is being applied consistently to give pupils a clear idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- You have rightly identified that standards of reading now need to be improved and you and your staff are approaching this with determination, drawing on the successful approaches that you used to improve writing. You have invested in a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books and are placing a considerable emphasis on reading for pleasure, as well as reading for other purposes. The high-quality displays around the school reflect this. In order to encourage others to extend their reading, pupils in Year 6 have drawn up a list of 'Eleven books you must read before you are eleven'. Younger children have identified 'Five books to read before you are five'. You have also made good use of drama workshops and visits to the theatre to stimulate pupils' interest in Shakespeare. You have reviewed your approach to the teaching of reading across the school and provided training on this for all staff. Your own analysis shows that this is leading to improvements. For example, in the early years the proportion of children who were able to read by the middle of last term was considerably higher than in the previous year. In the past, the gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and that of the rest of the school has been wider in reading than in writing and mathematics. However, the most recent analysis shows that

disadvantaged pupils are now making good progress in reading and their standards are improving.

- Another appropriate focus in your development plan is on improving attendance. To tackle this, you have introduced a system of rewards for school attendance, with a prominent display in the assembly hall of the names of those who have achieved various levels of success. The learning mentor is also working with the families of pupils who are persistently absent to help them get their children to school regularly and on time. These approaches are having a positive effect. The attendance figures for last term showed an improvement on the equivalent period the previous year, especially for disadvantaged pupils. There has also been a distinct reduction in persistent absence over the last two years.
- Pupils of all ages behave very well in and around the school. They are polite and considerate to adults and to each other. In class they work with great concentration and enthusiasm and even the youngest can be relied on to organise themselves and get on with their work, even when they are not directly overseen by a member of staff.
- Since the last inspection, you have conducted a thorough review of your curriculum. This was prompted by two factors. You wanted to ensure that you took on board the most recent revisions to the National Curriculum. Equally importantly, you had identified that the topic-based approach that you had used previously meant that you did not cover all the skills in each area. As a result, you now teach separate subjects, with each subject being led by a member of staff. This ensures that you have full coverage of the curriculum. It also gives all members of staff the opportunity to gain the leadership and management experiences that will enable them to further their careers. The individual subject plans have clear priorities and timescales. However, they do not include precise targets and measures to check whether pupils are making the intended improvements in knowledge, skills and understanding.
- The staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. They all agreed very strongly that they are proud to work at the school and that pupils are safe there. Individual comments referred to the sense of family, the high level of care and the good management in the school, as well as to the way that all staff work as a team.
- You and your colleagues place a very strong focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Through assemblies and themed days and weeks, pupils are given the opportunity to reflect on a

range of moral issues. They have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and contribute to the life of the school in a variety of ways, such as through membership of the school council and the eco council or through their work as prefects. Each year, the school focuses on developing pupils' understanding of a particular faith. As part of the work on British values, pupils have researched their own ancestry and produced a large display showing how several of them can trace their families to several countries across the world. This is being used to celebrate the diversity within the school and in Britain. The curriculum is enhanced through visits to the theatre, to concert halls and through projects conducted by visitors to the schools. The collaboration with a professional artist has been particularly successful and the children's work, based on the techniques of a range of painters and designers, is impressive. You regularly invite speakers from a wide range of occupations to share their experiences with the pupils, in order to extend their horizons and raise their aspirations.

- The governing body has recently been reconstituted and the number of committees reduced to two, to make business more manageable and to ensure greater involvement by each member. Governors receive regular reports on pupils' performance from you and your colleagues and use these, together with information gathered through visits to the school, to hold you to account. The governors to whom I spoke had a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and what the priorities for the next stage of development are. They ensure that good use is made of the additional funding for primary physical education and sport to enhance provision in the school. The report on this on the school's website is very informative and well-written and gives a succinct account of how the money has been spent and what the impact has been. It presents a clear rationale for the use of the money over three years and a precise indication of the proportions of pupils who have benefitted from the investment in extra training and additional equipment.
- The governors also ensure that appropriate use is made of the additional pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. The report on this traces the clear improvements that have been made in closing the gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. However, the lack of precise targets makes it difficult to determine what the school's intentions are and to what extent they have been achieved. The information about governors on the school's website is incomplete. For example, it does not include the record of governors' attendance at meetings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all plans include clear targets and measures for assessing the impact of any actions taken
- the information about governors on the school's website is complete.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders, two representatives from the local authority, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor. I looked at pupils' books and observed lessons in each year group. I spoke to pupils in classrooms and listened to them read. I also held a meeting with eight pupils, chosen at random from Years 3 to 6. I spoke to parents and grandparents as they brought their children to school. I examined and discussed a range of documentation relating to pupils' progress and safeguarding. I examined the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff and parents. I examined the displays in classrooms and in corridors and spoke to a range of staff in an around the school.