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5 March 2018

Nichola Hegarty
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Dear Ms Hegarty

Short inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 February 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You are a passionate and dedicated headteacher who has reinvigorated the school over the last few years. Leaders and governors alike demonstrate a hunger to improve all aspects of the school. Staff are proud to be part of this school because they feel valued and respected. They invest time in each other's development and celebrate each other's successes. Governors see staff as the school's largest asset. Pupils also agree and relationships across the school are excellent. This has created a forward-thinking culture of mutual respect where pupils love learning. Pupils show strong Christian values in their actions and reflect the humour, kindness and compassion of your leadership.

The school has addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection effectively. You have established a system of peer support for teachers so that they can improve their teaching. This system has also been highly effective in developing the skills of middle leaders. You have also introduced further challenges for pupils' learning that have seen the proportion of pupils achieving the highest standards match those seen nationally for writing and mathematics. However, we agreed that more could be done to challenge the most able pupils in reading. We also agreed that the support through the pupil premium funding should be targeted more specifically to challenge the most able disadvantaged pupils to achieve the highest standards in mathematics. In addition to this, we agreed that the promotion of children's number skills in the early years environment could also be improved upon. You have already identified these areas through a clear and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Effective training underpins a culture of nurture and care at the school. Staff know pupils well and they are vigilant. All staff refer any concerns to the designated leader for safeguarding without hesitation. Detailed records show that any worries around pupils' safety and well-being are addressed swiftly and comprehensively. The pupils that I spoke to feel that adults in the school are approachable. The positive response to the pupils' survey confirms this. They know that they are never alone and that staff will take time to listen to their concerns. Consequently, pupils feel safe at the school. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including when online, because of the effective teaching that they receive.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, we agreed on a number of key lines of enquiry. We agreed to look at how effectively the most able pupils in key stage 2 are challenged in their reading. By the end of key stage 2, pupils achieve well. Although their progress overall is above the national average, the progress for the most able pupils is below that seen for others nationally. We agreed that further challenge for some of the most able pupils in their reading would enable more to make better progress. The most able pupils read well. They are fluent and expressive. However, given their technical success in reading, they sometimes skim over the meaning of different words and phrases. Although their comprehension of the overall text is good, pupils miss important details. Leaders are addressing this by introducing a greater focus on inference and extending pupils' vocabulary. Pupils' dictionary skills ensure that they have opportunities to search out the meaning of complex words. However, they need further encouragement to do this when reading independently.
- We also agreed to look at how effectively leaders use the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils to achieve the highest standards in mathematics. Leaders use the pupil premium to provide pastoral support and wider opportunities for disadvantaged pupils. In this they are successful. Pupils settle well in lessons and engage in their work. The school's own information shows differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in mathematics. Although leaders have identified this, the targeting of funding is not addressing the difference in mathematics effectively enough. Consequently, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is not as high as it is in other subjects, such as reading. Leaders have already identified the need to set higher aspirations for the most able pupils so that they can achieve the highest standards. Presently, the use of funding lacks a strategy to achieve this and, as such, the progress of disadvantaged pupils across the school in mathematics is variable. There are early signs of improvement. Middle leaders' tracking of pupils' attainment indicates that the new scheme of work implemented in 2016 is providing opportunities for pupils to practise their calculation skills in depth. The work in pupils' books shows that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. Where this is most evident, they have the opportunity to apply their learning, with one example being in Year 3, where pupils' mathematics jotters are full of reasoning and problem-solving puzzles.
- We also agreed to look at how effectively leaders are sustaining the three-year trend of improvement in mathematics in the early years. Standards in mathematics remain below

those seen nationally by the end of the Reception Year. However, leaders' effective actions have ensured that children make good progress from starting points that are generally lower than those typical for their age. The early years leader is dedicated and motivated. She has worked tirelessly to promote a smoother start for children entering the school by working with the local nursery. One parent responding to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, commented on 'the brilliant induction process that helped children to settle in very well'. Children are inquisitive learners and are keen to discuss their work. They confidently explore their learning because they feel secure in the setting. This gets children off to a flying start to their school life. Parents and carers are very positive about the regular updates that they receive about their child's learning. These learning journeys document how children choose to use their mathematical skills in different areas of learning. Adults question children expertly by asking open-ended questions so that pupils lead their own work. However, we agreed that the environment lacks further opportunities to extend pupils' learning in number, particularly in the outdoor area.

- Finally, we looked at how effectively leaders promote the development of pupils' skills in science and geography. Leaders promote practical activities in these subjects to deepen pupils' learning through first-hand experience. The evidence in pupils' books shows good progress. However, this work does not represent the true breadth and depth of the curriculum in geography and science. Pupils describe a dynamic and engaging curriculum that is supplemented by special themed weeks. They reflect well on the skills they have developed, particularly in science. Leaders keep photographs to showcase the practical activities such den-building in Year 2 to test different materials and opportunities for outdoor learning to develop pupils' orienteering skills. Pupils progress well in their skills development because of the memorable activities that teachers plan. The pupils I spoke to feel that the best aspects of the school are the interesting opportunities that they get to learn.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- higher expectations are set for the most able disadvantaged pupils when planning the use of the pupil premium funding to help them to achieve the highest standards in mathematics
- there is a continued focus on the most able pupils' comprehension skills so that they can achieve the highest standards in reading
- opportunities are further developed for children in the early years to use their number skills in different areas of learning, particularly in the outside area.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of this inspection, I met with leaders and governors to discuss safeguarding and aspects of the school's leadership and management. Together, we visited all classes to observe pupils' learning. I heard pupils read as part of classroom activities. I also heard pupils from key stage 2 read individually. I reviewed documentation about safeguarding, which included the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff. I spoke with pupils about safeguarding, behaviour and different aspects of their science and geography work. I conducted a scrutiny of key stage 2 pupils' mathematics, science and geography work, as well as upper key stage 2 reading journals. I reviewed copies of Reception children's learning journeys. I analysed leaders' records of the monitoring of teaching and learning, governing body minutes, the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses and the school development plan. I took into account 27 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 52 responses to the pupil survey and 18 responses to the staff survey.