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Mr Neil McDermott
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Poole
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Dear Mr McDermott

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Poole

Following my visit to the school on 9 February 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2014.

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 have led with determination and rigour through a period of change; there have been considerable changes in staffing since the previous inspection.

You have a clear vision for the school. This combined with a strong, coordinated drive for improvement from leaders, at all levels, has ensured that the school has recovered well after a dip in its performance.

You are persistent and firm in your approach. You hold teachers to account well. As a result, pupils are getting the good-quality teaching and support they need so that their learning needs are met and any prior underachievement is tackled effectively.

The school environment is calm and purposeful. Pupils look out for one another and value the opportunities they receive. Those in positions of authority take on their responsibilities with pride, for example, sports leaders at lunchtime, who plan wide-ranging activities and skills development for pupils across the school. In short, pupils are encouraged to feel at ease in their school and there is a strong sense of belonging. All pupils I talked to on inspection said that they enjoyed school and felt proud to be part of it. Every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, reported that their child was happy at school.

At the previous inspection you were asked to put plans in place for staff to share their expertise to enable further improvements in teaching. Your work in this regard is effective. An example of this is the priority you have put on additional training for teachers new to the profession. You work closely with Springhill Catholic Primary School in Southampton who provide coaching support and peer-to-peer teaching reviews. In the last year, this innovative approach has improved middle leadership and has resulted in a more precise focus on raising pupils' achievement.

You were also asked to develop pupils' writing. Pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 2 has steadily improved and has been in line with or above the national average for the last two years. However, some aspects of writing development could be strengthened further, for example, ensuring that low- and middle-ability pupils are more accurate in their spelling in Years 3 and 4.

Leaders throughout the school, including governors, are working on the right aspects for improvement. However, further work is required so that teachers respond swiftly to address any gaps in pupils' learning and/or misconceptions that arise, including in the early years.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have responded promptly to the recent training and audit by the multi-academy trust, strengthening the school's work to safeguard pupils. As a result, the single central record is up to date and school systems relating to staff vetting checks have improved. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. Governors responsible for safeguarding have strengthened their checks and hold the school to account well. They report their findings at every full governing body meeting.

Recent training for all staff is up to date and follows the most recent national guidance. Improved induction of staff enables them to apply the school's policies and guidance to keep pupils safe confidently.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. The staff I spoke to know how to make timely referrals should concerns be raised. School documentation confirms concerns are followed up precisely. Leaders work closely with external agencies to minimise children's risk of harm.

Inspection findings

To ascertain that the school remained good, a key line of enquiry focused on teachers' use of assessment to build on what pupils already know in key stage 1, so that pupils' progress is sustained and at least good.

- Teachers use robust assessments well to secure improved achievement. For example, those pupils currently in Years 1 and 2 who failed to meet the expected standard in writing at the end of early years are making strong and often rapid progress. Leaders have tackled quickly historical weaknesses in these pupils'

writing skills. As a result, pupils now write with greater confidence and stamina, and with good accuracy in punctuation, phonics and spelling.

- A small group of lower-attaining pupils still have a distance to travel before they meet age-related expectations. This is because some misconceptions are left unresolved. Leaders know they need to improve teachers' checks on pupils' understanding and take swift action when learning falters.
- Pupils' progress beyond key stage 1 is sustained well. Pupils are increasingly able to write for different purposes and audiences and their sentence construction and composition shows marked improvement over time. However, leaders accurately identify that some lower- and middle-ability pupils do not apply spelling rules as effectively as they could in Years 3 and 4.

My second line of enquiry was about how effective teaching is in the early years. This is because outcomes in the early years have been below the national average for the last two years.

- Children are now making good progress from their different starting points. Governors have successfully supported and challenged school leaders to strengthen children's outcomes at this phase. Leaders have prioritised additional teaching resources and funding to ensure that children get off to a good start and achieve consistently well. The additional intervention in place to support the many children who enter the early years with skills and knowledge below their age is making a positive difference.
- Teaching in the early years is typically good. Children enjoy the activities on offer and many show high levels of independence. For example, children cooperated maturely to make a giant rocket ship and others wrote postcards to Tim Peake about his adventures in space.
- Leaders are determined to ensure that the provision on offer builds consistently on children's prior understanding so that any remaining weaknesses in children's speech and language development and writing are tackled quickly.

My third line of enquiry was about how well leaders are driving improvement at this school so that pupils' achievement continues to rise.

- There is a robust and coordinated response from leaders, at all levels, to raise pupils' achievement. The headteacher, senior and middle leaders are quick to address any weaknesses in teaching and learning affecting the progress of specific groups of pupils. Consequently, leaders' actions are making a discernible difference and pupils' achievement continues to rise. Increasingly, governors hold the school to account well. This includes their checks on the impact of funding for disadvantaged pupils, pupils' progress in literacy and provision in the early years.

My final line of enquiry was about the impact of the school's systems to ensure that pupils' attendance is good, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. This is because attendance for this group has been low in the past.

- Overall, pupils' attendance is in line with the national average. Close monitoring by leaders and governors is improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Any lower rates of attendance are being robustly tackled. Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils to attend breakfast club,

reducing lateness and absence considerably. Leaders coordinate the response of a range of professionals successfully where pupils have not previously attended well enough so that their attendance is increasing steadily.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' checks of pupils' understanding are systematic and thorough in lessons so that no misconceptions are left unresolved
- early years provision builds consistently on children's prior understanding so that a greater proportion of children make high rates of progress and any remaining weaknesses in children's speech and language development and writing are tackled quickly
- low- and middle-ability pupils in Years 3 and 4 accurately apply age-appropriate spelling rules in their writing across the curriculum

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is a larger than the average-sized primary school and is part of the Plymouth Catholic and Anglican Schools Trust. The Trust was formed in April 2014. The work of the Trust is overseen by a board of directors. The Trust is responsible for: one nursery; one first school; 32 primary schools; and two secondary schools across seven local authorities in the south-west region.

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, governors, newly qualified teachers, and pupils. I also met with the area adviser for the trust and had a telephone conversation with the headteacher of Springhill Catholic School in Southampton.

Together, we observed pupils' learning across the school, with a focus on writing development. I looked at work in books to establish the current quality of pupils' work and their progress over time. I also listened to pupils read. I scrutinised school documents including the school's action plan and its school self-evaluation document. I also looked at records relating to behaviour and safety, attendance and safeguarding.

I considered 43 responses to the online survey, Parent View. I also considered the views of staff and pupils through an online survey and discussions during my visit.