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David Nicholson
Assistant Headteacher (Acting Headteacher)
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Dear Mr Nicholson

Short inspection of The Saint Mary's Catholic Primary School, Grantham

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Thank you for assisting in the inspection in the absence of the headteacher, who has been absent from the school since November 2016.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have continued to improve the school and have addressed weaknesses as they have arisen. There is a great desire to improve the school further. You are clear about the school's strengths and where further improvements are required. Plans are in place to help bring these improvements about. However, they are not as detailed as they need to be in order for the impact of the school's improvement work to be checked and evaluated easily throughout the year.

Governors know the school well. They are ambitious for the pupils who attend the school and have a solid understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have the skills necessary to hold leaders to account and, through their committee structure, they ensure that good outcomes for pupils are maintained.

You have successfully addressed the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. Leaders have worked hard to share the best practice which exists in the school and to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. This work has been enhanced by the introduction of additional teaching programmes. However, some of these programmes are still relatively new and are not always being used in the most effective way to support all pupils.

Subject leaders have been given the time needed to enable them to increase the contribution they make to school improvement. This has allowed them to support colleagues, check standards in the subjects they lead and challenge staff when pupils are not making the progress they should.

Pupils listen respectfully to staff, follow school rules and work well, both independently and together. They are keen to learn new things and to make as much progress as they can. The pupils I spoke with were articulate, confident and polite.

You have ensured that new staff who join the school receive high-quality support that takes into account their previous experience. This helps them to settle into the school quickly and provides continuity of learning for the pupils.

You acknowledge that there is still work to be done. You recognise that precise success criteria in the school improvement plan, which are focused on pupils' outcomes, would help you check its impact more easily. You are also aware that work is not always pitched at the right level in mathematics to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress. The recent programme introduced in mathematics has yet to be fully implemented. This means that you are unclear of its impact upon pupils' outcomes for different groups of pupils. Finally, you agree that the school's system for tracking behaviour does not provide leaders or governors with an accurate overview of behaviour incidents. It does not identify clearly how the actions you are taking are making a difference and improving behaviour.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding is given a high priority and that it continues to be effective. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are kept up to date about safeguarding matters through a well-organised and regular programme of training, including about areas of national concern, such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. They have a clear understanding of how to deal with any concerns. Safeguarding is seen as a collective responsibility throughout the school.

The administration of safeguarding and safety-related matters is efficient. Records are effectively maintained.

Pupils are kept safe and are supported effectively through a strong working relationship between the school, external agencies and the local authority. Pupils told the inspector that they feel safe at the school. The school's curriculum helps pupils to develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. A large majority of parents and carers, through Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own parental survey, agree that their children are safe. However, a small minority of parents did not believe this to be the case.

Inspection findings

- Leaders use their accurate knowledge of the school's performance to identify and plan the actions they need to take to secure further improvement. The school improvement plan includes a series of objectives and actions aimed at bringing about the required improvements. However, it does not provide a clear set of success criteria, related to pupils' outcomes, by which governors or other stakeholders can measure progress.
- Subject leaders are taking an active role in checking the quality of teaching and learning and the impact these have on pupils' progress and attainment. They provide support for their colleagues and act as good role models.
- Teachers use assessment information effectively to plan for pupils' needs. This ensures that any gaps in knowledge are identified quickly and teachers provide well-targeted additional support. In mathematics lessons, however, work is not consistently pitched at the right level to ensure that all groups make good progress. A new teaching programme has been introduced recently and leaders have not yet evaluated its impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Pupils behave well around the school site. They use the outdoor space sensibly to play, talk and have fun. Staff supervision is clearly visible and social time behaviour rules have been introduced after discussion with the pupils themselves. However, pupils and parents say that some instances of poor behaviour and bullying do still occur. The school's system for tracking behaviour is not sophisticated enough to identify any patterns or trends of poor behaviour, and so the impact of actions taken by leaders cannot be measured. Governors are unable to evaluate how successfully leaders are addressing concerns about poor behaviour issues.
- The attainment of pupils by the end of key stage 1 was broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016. However, pupils who had been lower-attaining or middle-attaining at the end Reception did not do as well as similar pupils nationally. Leaders have put in place effective measures to help these groups, now in Year 3, to catch up.
- The pupils I listened to read did so with confidence and used their phonics skills effectively. They told me that they enjoyed reading and all of them read every day, both in school and at home.
- Senior leaders have raised their ambition of what pupils are capable of achieving. This is ensuring that most-able pupils are sufficiently challenged to reach the high standards they are capable of achieving.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. Instances of underachievement are quickly identified and additional support provided. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are now catching up quickly with other pupils nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school improvement plan has measurable success criteria linked to pupils' outcomes, so that actions taken by leaders to bring about improvements can be more accurately measured
- the new teaching programme introduced to improve mathematics is reviewed and evaluated
- work in mathematics is pitched at the right level for pupils to make rapid progress from their different starting points
- the school's mechanisms for recording pupils' behaviour can be used to measure the impact of actions taken to improve behaviour in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Vondra Mays
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with the assistant headteacher (in the role of acting headteacher), the special educational needs coordinator, middle leaders and representatives of the governing body. I made a series of visits to lessons. For most of these I was accompanied by the special educational needs coordinator. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around the school and at playtime. I spoke with a group of pupils and I listened to pupils read from Year 1 and Year 3. In addition, I considered a broad range of documents. Safeguarding practices were also reviewed. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.

I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school in the morning and I considered the views of 29 parents posted on Ofsted's online survey (Parent View), including 15 free-text responses, as well as the school's own parental survey.