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Mrs Rebecca Tregear
Headteacher
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery
Merry Hill Road
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Dear Mrs Tregear

Short inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery is a welcoming, caring community which reflects its Catholic ethos. One parent summed this up by calling it 'a lovely learning environment with friendly staff and good moral roots'. Another parent commented: 'The emotional and social well-being of the children is first and foremost at this school. It is a caring and happy school and my children love attending.'

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of changes within the leadership team. The school has been through a period of transition with your appointment as headteacher in September 2017. You and your deputy headteacher are establishing a strong team of staff and governors who understand their role in improving the school and share your vision. You are already working well with governors and staff to review plans so that actions can be clearly tracked and monitored, showing clear next steps.

Governors take an active part in school life and have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring that the school meets all statutory requirements. Governors use their skills and expertise well to allocate responsibilities for monitoring key aspects of the school's work. They provide you with both support and challenge.

The school has been well supported by the local authority and leaders have been active in responding to advice. As a result, there is stronger leadership and improved provision in the Reception classes so that children get off to a good start and are ready for the next stage in their education. In the Reception classes, adults build up positive relationships with children, who enjoy learning both within the classroom and in the outside environment. Children begin mark-making and developing their knowledge of phonics early on. Some children are already using their phonics knowledge to write simple words. Another child proudly wrote her name in chalk on the ground and then read it back. During an adult-led activity, a child was observed adding candles to a birthday cake made out of modelling dough. First the adult asked what shape his cake was going to be and how many sides it would have. The child then added a number of candles to demonstrate that he could recognise numbers to 10.

The majority of parents are very positive about the provision and feel that you have a strong vision to drive the school forward. They value the relationships that have already been established by working in partnership through your 'open-door' policy and the Parent Forum, where they have an opportunity to discuss any issues.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are of a high quality.

There is a culture in the school that safeguarding is 'everyone's responsibility, every day'. You and your administrative staff ensure that thorough checks are made on all staff to confirm their suitability to work with children and that day-to-day health and safety are well managed. Records are detailed and well maintained. You ensure that there is regular and effective training for all staff and governors, so that they are up to date in their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. Induction for new staff is thorough, showing that you are doing all you can to make sure that pupils are safe.

There are clear policies, procedures and systems to ensure effective safeguarding within the school. Leaders and governors have been active in completing a safeguarding audit, taking action to ensure that the site is secure and improving systems for vetting visitors to the school.

The website complies with statutory guidance.

Pupils said that they enjoy school and feel safe. One pupil described the school by saying: 'We are proud to show people around so that we can talk about what it is really like here.' Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet. They have a good understanding of bullying and say that they feel confident to talk to an adult, who will sort out any issues quickly. Pupils take their additional responsibilities as 'bullying ambassadors' and 'peer mediators' seriously and one pupil summed this up by saying: 'We are one big family as we sing, learn and play together.'

Inspection findings

- To decide whether the school was still good, I explored a number of key lines of enquiry during the inspection. My first key line of enquiry was to check on the quality of teaching, learning and use of assessment, as this was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. I wanted to find out how pupils are supported and challenged within lessons to make good progress from their starting points.
- Teachers value the opportunities to work together as the school supports a culture of peer coaching. You, along with your leadership team, undertake regular learning walks and observations of teaching and learning within the school. Feedback supports teachers in understanding their strengths and areas for development. Monitoring of this aspect of the school's work is thorough and ensures that all staff are appropriately supported, but also held to account through performance management.
- We undertook a learning walk and visited all classes, where we observed teaching and learning in both English and mathematics. The use of questioning is strong in many lessons and questioning is used well to extend learning and challenge pupils in their thinking. Pupils are encouraged to 'talk to their partner', for example to explain their thinking and reasoning in mathematics or to express how a character might be feeling when writing. In an upper key stage 2 English lesson, the teacher expected all pupils to take part in the discussion. Pupils were asked what they noticed about how a sentence was written. One pupil replied with an example of a rhetorical question relating to their own experiences.
- Teachers show pupils what they expect them to learn and give them the resources they need to be successful in lessons. When expectations are high, pupils achieve well in lessons, but in some classes the pace slows. You agreed that sometimes pupils are not set off on more challenging tasks quickly enough when they have mastered a concept.
- The school's monitoring of teaching and learning over time demonstrates that they are largely good, although you recognise that there are some pockets of variation in classes and subjects. At times, teachers do not use assessment within lessons well enough to adapt or modify tasks as the needs of pupils change.
- In 2016, some pupils in key stage 1 did not attain the expected standard in reading and writing. In reading, girls performed slightly better than boys. Therefore, my second key line of enquiry was to review the impact of actions taken to raise attainment in reading and writing in key stage 1. The school's own information about how well pupils achieve and pupils' workbooks from last year indicate that the proportion of pupils who achieved age-related expectations and the higher standards by the end of 2017 were above the national expectations in reading and writing. The teaching of phonics continues to be a strength of the school and pupils make accelerated progress in reading at the end of key stage 1 from their starting points.
- New reading books have been purchased and there is a growing culture of reading for enjoyment within the school. For example, older pupils enjoy sharing newspapers for young people and pupils are encouraged to research projects at

home. Teachers are role models as they read with their class and point out key features of different genres of writing.

- Teachers use a variety of approaches to motivate pupils to write well, including role play. Older pupils were observed visualising images from the text that they were reading before creating their own phrases to use in their writing. There is developing evidence of opportunities for pupils to write across a range of subjects and you plan to increase this even further.
- Pupils use visual symbols or checklists effectively, which support them in checking their own work and enable them to achieve their learning goals. You agreed that, in some classes, pupils do not always have the opportunity to show their independence when completing tasks and that they need to be encouraged to take a greater lead in their own learning.
- My final key line of enquiry was related to the progress and attainment of pupils in mathematics. In 2016, attainment in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was below the national average and, over the past two years, pupils have made less progress in mathematics than in reading and writing. Senior leaders have identified this as a key school priority so that pupils develop their reasoning skills in mathematics while learning how to apply and explain their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- In lessons, pupils are encouraged to think in different ways and teachers are starting successfully to deepen pupils' thinking from concrete to pictorial to abstract. Younger pupils are provided with resources, including manipulatives, as a visual support in lessons. However, they are not generally allowed to choose these independently when they need them. Sometimes, the most able pupils are not fully challenged because they have completed work and are waiting for the teacher to set the next task.
- Pupils are increasingly confident in applying their knowledge and skills to problem-solving and explaining their reasoning. Attainment information for 2017 indicates that, at the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected and higher standards was in line with national averages and there was a slight improvement in the progress pupils made in mathematics. Over the coming year, your school will be taking part in the Hertfordshire 'Improving Progress in Mathematics' project. This will support pupils in revisiting concepts and developing an increased depth of understanding towards 'mastery' and aims to continue to improve progress in mathematics across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment is used more effectively within lessons to move pupils on in their learning so that they can make the most progress they are capable of
- pupils are provided with wider opportunities for independence so that they take a greater lead in their learning to take risks and develop resilience.

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

Yours sincerely

Pauline MacMillan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and other members of staff with leadership responsibility. I also met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

We both undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and as they moved around classes.

I met with pupils to discuss their learning and gather their views about the school, behaviour and safety.

A number of documents were reviewed, including the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, the school's own checks on the quality of teaching, governing body minutes and pupils' assessment and progress information.

I took account of 98 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, completed by parents, 49 free-text messages from parents, seven responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 62 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.