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26 March 2019

Miss Dawn Richards
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Dear Miss Richards

Short inspection of St Francis Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2019, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The Christian ethos of the school strongly underpins its values, which are evident across the school. Standards of behaviour are exemplary and relationships between adults and children are based on mutual respect. These very strong relationships ensure that pupils receive the support they need and are kept safe.

Leaders have established an atmosphere which is exceptionally calm and welcoming. Pupils are happy, confident and eager to learn. They enjoy coming to school. The staff are proud to work at the school and they challenge all pupils to do better by having consistently high expectations.

You provide many opportunities for staff within school to effectively take on new responsibilities. This trust and faith in their ability to lead and develop initiatives are clearly appreciated, as shown in the overwhelmingly positive responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. Equally, it has an impact on the overall high standard of teaching that pupils experience across each key stage. Through regular formal and

informal monitoring, leaders have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. All leaders play a clearly defined and effective role in monitoring the effectiveness of the work of the school. New ways of working are carefully evaluated to ensure that they are having a positive effect on pupils' progress.

Children who start their education at St Francis in Reception quickly begin to make increasingly strong progress from different starting points. However, there are weaknesses in the provision for outdoor learning in the early years. This is an area for improvement.

As a result of high-quality teaching, pupils' outcomes at the expected standard by the end of key stage 2 are above the national average for writing and mathematics and significantly above for reading. You also identified that 2018 published outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 represented slightly above-average attainment in these three subjects. Leaders have since focused on further strengthening the quality of teaching in this phase. Consequently, pupils' work now shows even stronger progress across all year groups.

Governors have a very strong understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They apply their expertise well. Governors with professional experience in a wide variety of areas, including safeguarding and the early years, use their knowledge to provide appropriate support and challenge. The chair of the governing body, together with governors, has devised an appropriate link-governor structure to hold leaders to account. Link governors receive regular information on pupils' outcomes and question leaders, including subject leaders, on all aspects of progress. Governors carry out regular visits to the school to gain direct insight into pupils' perceptions and development.

You have addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection well. Now, all teaching staff, through effective planning and using accurate information they receive from pupil progress meetings, quickly identify pupils who are struggling with their learning. Teachers and teaching assistants then provide effective support, ensuring that these pupils make similarly strong progress to that made by pupils who find learning easier. You have also successfully addressed the teaching of phonics. You and your staff have made it a priority to provide a range of age-appropriate books that pupils want to read. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check remains above the national average.

Parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school. They very much appreciate the level of care and guidance that is given to their children as a matter of routine. As one parent, typical of many, stated, 'The school is fantastic and the staff do an amazing job.'

You and your team engender a culture of mutual respect and tolerance, where the uniqueness of every child is valued. Pupils value their education and this is reflected in their increasing desire to come to school on a regular basis. Pupils can explain

clearly the school's mission statement and talk passionately about how it is put into practice by everyone within school. As one young pupil spoken to said: 'Through playing and praying, loving and learning, respecting and responding, sharing and serving, I know everyone is special, cared for at school.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You place strong emphasis on providing support for pupils and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Staff with designated responsibility for safeguarding liaise effectively with external agencies where appropriate. Staff understand their responsibilities to keep children safe. You have ensured that necessary checks are carried out on adults to ensure their suitability to work with children. Records in respect of this are well maintained.

Pupils' emotional and social development is given a high priority. This is reflected in the strong relationships which exist between staff and pupils. Pupils who shared their views during the inspection said that they trusted members of staff to support them with any worries which may arise.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online, both within school and at home. They are given good opportunities across the curriculum to explore their understanding of being safe overall and how they can keep each other safe. For example, you have recently held pupil awareness workshops for Years 5 and 6 on the dangers of knife crime. Pupils spoken to were clearly able to identify the serious risks identified by this initiative.

Inspection findings

- At our initial meeting, we discussed the priorities for the school, its direction and the areas that you have identified for improvement. We agreed on a number of key lines of enquiry.
- The first was to consider teaching across the school and its effectiveness in improving progress for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. You make sure that teachers have the information and training they need to accurately assess pupils' progress. As a result, pupils who are falling behind are identified without delay and given the help they need to catch up. You know which interventions work best and spend pupil premium funding wisely to secure effective support for disadvantaged pupils, including the most able.
- The emphasis on making learning both fun and challenging was reflected in all lessons observed during the inspection and is clear in work in pupils' books over time. Pupils work hard and demonstrate consistently positive attitudes to learning.
- Along with other leaders, you have employed a wide range of strategies aimed at boosting pupils' enthusiasm for science. The inspection took place during science week. In a Year 3 lesson for example, pupils were seen cooperating with each other in small groups and confidently using scientific equipment to investigate

differing materials' capacity to conduct electricity. In another lesson, Year 5 pupils were demonstrating their high levels of motivation and independence, hypothesising the most appropriate features a parachute would need to safely land 'an eggstronaut' back on earth.

- You recognise the importance of pupils' good attendance in keeping them safe. There was a rise in pupils' absence rates in 2018, and you have been successful in reversing this. You continue to check frequently on the attendance rates of pupils and work closely with their parents. As a result, the attendance rate for pupils has further improved to be close to the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outdoor equipment and the provision for outdoor learning in the early years are improved, allowing children to have even more opportunity to make progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Steven Cartlidge
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you and other leaders. Together, we visited classes to observe pupils' learning and scrutinised their work. I talked to pupils in lessons and in a meeting, when I listened to their views of the school and listened to some of them read. A wide range of documentary evidence was scrutinised, including information about pupils' performance, the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and safeguarding documentation. I met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I looked at your monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment and governing body documents. I took account of 34 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 19 free-text comments, and spoke to a parent on the telephone. I also considered the 17 responses to the staff questionnaire and 22 responses from pupils.