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Mrs Catherine Frost
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Frost

Short inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 September 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your leadership teams in key stage 1 and key stage 2 have been instrumental in introducing a new curriculum across the school. Leaders have also implemented new whole-school approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. As a result of these changes, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education, and for life generally. Teachers and teaching assistants who completed the Ofsted online staff questionnaire feel that they have been well supported by leaders during a period of significant change.

At the previous inspection in 2014, inspectors asked the leadership team, including governors, to hold middle leaders more rigorously to account. Leadership teams frequently observe how pupils are learning in class, scrutinise pupils' written work across a range of subjects and check that teachers are planning for the range of abilities in their class. This ensures that teachers are following agreed systems and procedures for planning appropriate activities and keeping pupils informed of their progress and how to improve their work. It also allows leaders to check on pupils' progress and plan appropriate interventions to support pupils who need extra help. You and your leaders set targets in the school improvement plan which are challenging and measurable and reflected in precise targets for individual teachers. You provide many opportunities for your subject leaders to work with staff from other schools, local authority specialists and external consultants. This has led to leaders and teachers securing their accuracy in the assessment of pupils' work.

There is now greater consistency the quality of teaching and learning across year groups. This is evident of improvements in progress throughout the school.

Inspectors also asked you to improve the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievement. You provide opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to share best practice across the school and in other schools, nurturing a culture of continuous improvement among your staff. You also provide placements within your school for trainee teachers to develop their skills and experience. You demonstrate your commitment to developing your staff team through a programme of professional development which is appreciated by your colleagues. The impact can be seen in consistently strong teaching throughout the school.

Inspectors also asked that staff in early years provide children with opportunities to use and apply what they have learned in adult-directed sessions in their independently chosen activities. Staff meticulously record children's activities in their individual learning journeys. From these, it is evident to see how the early years leader and staff provide opportunities to build on what children have learned. For example, following on from reading 'Whatever next!' some children chose to build a rocket and use their imaginations to create their own journey into space. Staff are adept at finding out what stimulates children and providing opportunities to develop the imaginations of children through a range of opportunities both indoors and outside.

In 2017, the proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, reaching the standard expected nationally at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics was in line with the national average. Provisional data for 2018 shows a dip in Year 6 standards but current data and pupils' work shows an improving picture across the school. This is a result of the teachers and teaching assistants fully embracing the new whole-school approaches that you and your leaders have introduced to teach the core subjects.

Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school. Relationships between staff, pupils and parents are warm and positive. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning, which can be seen in the way in which they listen well, both to their teachers and to their classmates' ideas and answers. Typically, they behave impeccably in class and around school and are a credit to you, your staff and to pupils' families.

The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, are very appreciative of the work of you and your staff and said they would recommend this school to others. They really appreciate the welcome that you extend to them and the wider family each morning. Parents describe the school community as 'like a family' in the way that it encourages friendships across different age ranges through, for example, birthday and playtime buddies.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders carry out appropriate checks on staff and governors to make sure they are suitable to work with children. These checks are recorded diligently. Staff and governors receive regular training covering different aspects of safeguarding. As a result, staff understand the procedures to follow if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive the support they need.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, especially when using the internet. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View said their children felt safe and well cared for in school. Incidents of bullying are very rare in this harmonious learning community. Although one parental concern was raised during the inspection relating to bullying, the inspector found that there are clear systems and procedures in place that staff follow when responding to incidents. Pupils have a good understanding of what they should do if they have any concerns.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I focused on several agreed aspects. I looked at how effectively you and your staff have taken action to improve outcomes in the phonics screening check in Year 1. You have invested in a new phonics scheme which was implemented in September 2017. The leader who has responsibility for reading throughout the school ensured that teachers and teaching assistants were trained in the new scheme and in using new resources in order to teach phonics and reading effectively. As a result, there is now a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics in Reception class, key stage 1 and, when necessary, for older pupils. Leaders regularly analyse information to identify any pupils who are struggling. They act swiftly to ensure that pupils receive help to catch up quickly. As a result, pupils' outcomes in phonics are now much stronger than previously for all groups of pupils. However, I identified a need for leaders to routinely check that the books younger pupils are taking home are reinforcing the learning taking place in phonics sessions. In addition, there are inconsistencies among teachers and teaching assistants in modelling the accurate pronunciation of letters and their sounds.
- Next, I explored how a culture of reading is being embedded across the school. Staff have developed an environment that promotes the excitement and anticipation that comes with reading a book from when children start school in early years. I observed children in early years, who were only in their third week of attending school, enjoying dressing up and immersed in recreating their own performance of 'Beauty and the beast'. With prompts from staff, they were able to recall the order of events from the fairy tale that they had listened to earlier in class and which had clearly captured their imaginations. You provide opportunities for parents to build their skills in how to help their children with reading at home. Parents told me how much they appreciate the support they receive to help with their children's learning beyond school. You and your staff

are vigilant in recognising when pupils are not reading at home and therefore falling behind. Staff and volunteers do as much as they can to plug this gap, and you continue to work with the few parents who do not regularly read at home with their children. Through the new whole-school approach to teaching reading, teachers and teaching assistants are inspiring a love of reading across each key stage. Older pupils told me how important it is to become competent and fluent readers, both for pleasure and to secure jobs when they are older. They spoke enthusiastically about their favourite authors and genres of book.

- I looked at the opportunities pupils have to develop a love of learning across the wider curriculum. Pupils told me how much they enjoy all aspects of school life and this was clear to see during the course of the inspection. Teachers plan learning opportunities which broaden pupils' horizons and raise pupils' aspirations. This is reflected in the views of some of the older pupils who told me that they are ambitious for their future careers and have their sights set on becoming doctors, teachers, gymnasts and following other professional careers. Teachers organise residential trips for older pupils to an outdoor education centre where pupils are encouraged to try new experiences and this builds on their teamwork skills. Pupils learn to play the harp and the ukulele and, together with the arts week taking place during the inspection, demonstrates the importance you place on developing pupils' creativity. Staff 'go the extra mile' in providing after-school, extra-curricular activities such as dance, choir and many inter-school sporting competitions. Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to learn about how to care for their local environment and celebrate the diverse community of which they are a part. Parents' appreciation of the broad and balanced curriculum was reflected in a comment that 'a particular strength is in the team of staff who work really hard to give our children rich experiences'.
- Finally, I explored how leaders monitor the attendance of pupils. I was concerned about the increase in the number of pupils who had been persistently absent last year. You know your families very well, particularly the most vulnerable. You provided detailed evidence of how effectively you analyse punctuality and attendance. In the previous academic year, you appointed a teaching assistant to work with families who you have identified as allowing their children to have too many absences. This appointment has had a very positive impact on decreasing the proportion of pupils with persistent absences and the overall amount of persistent absences. Your staff's extensive work with other agencies and the local authority is of a high calibre. They have solid evidence of success stories but still some parents do not always help their children to attend regularly enough and this hinders pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the books younger pupils take home are well matched to the phonics sounds and letters that pupils are learning
- staff continually model accurate pronunciation of letters and their sounds beyond phonics sessions

- you, your staff and external agencies continue to work with families whose children's progress is interrupted by too many absences.

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

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I held meetings with subject leaders; senior leaders; the chair and vice-chair of the governing body; with you, as the designated safeguarding leader, and one of your deputy safeguarding leaders. I spoke to a representative from the local authority and from the Diocese of Shrewsbury. I also spoke informally with parents at the school gates and took account of the 57 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I took account of 57 free-text responses from parents. I reviewed the 31 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. However, I also spoke informally to staff during the day. There was one response to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire, which I considered. I also held a meeting with pupils and spoke informally with pupils during breaks and in lessons. During the inspection, I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's development plans and self-evaluation documents; minutes of the governing body's meetings; safeguarding documentation; records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance; the school website; school policies; and pupils' work and their reading logs.