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Mrs Andrea Leslie
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Dear Mrs Leslie

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 July 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to address a range of areas for improvement. Leaders were asked to ensure that teachers fully challenge the most able pupils. In 2017, at the end of key stage 2 the proportions of pupils who achieved at greater depth were above the national averages for writing and mathematics. However, the proportions in reading in key stage 2, and in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1, were below the national averages. Pupils' current work shows that teachers do not consistently challenge pupils, including the most able, to make the progress that they should.

Leaders were also asked to improve pupils' achievement by ensuring that they carefully check pupils' progress so that underachievement can be quickly identified and addressed. Pupils' progress in reading by the end of key stage 2 has been significantly below the national averages for the last two years. Some groups of pupils, including boys and disadvantaged pupils, particularly in reading and writing, often do not make the progress that they should. Progress in meeting the areas for improvement has not been as rapid or secure as it should be, and you have rightly identified that these areas remain as priorities for the school.

You, other staff and the governing body are working with renewed determination to address these and other areas in which the school needs to improve. You and your

staff show the capacity to bring about improvement. The effectiveness of your work to develop your phonics programme in the early years and key stage 1, for example, is reflected in pupils' outcomes. The proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been above the national averages for the last two years.

Your current plans for improvement focus sharply on raising pupils' attainment and accelerating their progress, as well as identifying clear milestones for success. However, leaders do not use the detailed information they have about pupils' attainment and progress sharply enough to hold staff more fully to account for the progress made by different groups of pupils in their classes. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the learning gains made by pupils in different classes and subjects. In particular, there is a legacy of underachievement in reading in key stage 2 which is reflected in pupils' writing. Leaders have not ensured that all teachers teach pupils to make the links between reading and writing effectively, and that all teachers have consistently high expectations of the quality of pupils' work.

You, your senior leaders and other staff have recently introduced a range of actions to improve standards in reading such as reading challenges, new approaches to teaching comprehension skills and seeking the greater involvement of parents and carers. Teachers are skilled in promoting pupils' comprehension skills. Pupils in key stage 2, for example, told me about how they use the reading 'dogs' – characters that help them to improve their comprehension and other reading skills. These initiatives are beginning to have a positive impact.

Since the last inspection, standards of behaviour have remained high. Pupils are courteous and polite at all times of the school day. Teachers are enthusiastic, and praise pupils for their efforts. Relationships are a strength. As a result, pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and apply themselves fully to all that is asked of them. Pupils are confident, respectful and reflective. They understand the importance of the British value of respecting others who may have different beliefs. This helps to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. A pupil in key stage 2 told me, for example: 'It is important to understand that not everyone has the same opinion. Everyone does not follow one thing. People believe in different things.' Some pupils in key stage 2 were less confident, however, in their understanding of democracy.

The governing body is knowledgeable and ambitious for the school. The chair is revitalising the governing body. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and know where it should improve further. They are realistic in their appraisal of their own effectiveness and aspects in which they need to improve. They recognise that they are not as effective as they could be, for example in their use of school information to challenge and hold leaders to account for the progress of different groups of pupils. Leaders' and governors' evaluation of the effectiveness of the pupil premium is not sharp enough. The governing body recognises this also, and with the support of the trust it has commissioned a review to identify how it can improve its effectiveness in this area.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders take timely action when they have any concerns about pupils' well-being. They are aware, however, that aspects of their systems for recording their actions are not as effective as they could be to ensure that all relevant leaders and personnel have a more cohesive overview of all actions taken.

Staff receive relevant and up-to-date training. Governors visit the school to check safeguarding arrangements and are aware of their responsibilities. All checks for the recruitment of staff are in place. The school's single central record of checks and recruitment processes of staff suitable to work with children are thorough.

The school has a caring culture. The majority of parents I spoke with were very happy in all respects. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school and are very confident that staff will respond rapidly to any concerns they may have. Staff who responded to the staff questionnaire are very positive about working in the school.

Inspection findings

- Teachers do not consistently use information well about pupils' learning and progress to set work at the right level for pupils of different abilities. Too often, teachers ask the most able and pupils of average ability to complete the same work. In mathematics, pupils complete many examples of work at the same level of difficulty rather than moving on to more challenging work. In writing, teachers do not consistently challenge pupils to use grammar, punctuation and particularly spelling at a level appropriate to their ability. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress that they should to achieve at greater depth.
- Pupils' writing in key stage 2 shows that many pupils are not able to apply their reading skills effectively when writing. In key stage 2, spelling is sometimes poor. Teachers do not consistently and persistently reinforce the links between language, reading and writing to help ensure that pupils use accurate spelling in their work. Many pupils have spelling skills that are below what is expected for their age. As a result, this reduces the quality of work of pupils of all abilities.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers' expectations of the quality and presentation of pupils' work are consistently high in a range of different subjects. Sometimes, teachers do not give pupils clear and accurate guidance on how to improve their work. As a result, too many pupils do not make the progress that they should.
- Initiatives to improve standards in reading are beginning to have positive impact. Pupils were observed providing detailed answers to teachers' often-challenging questions. Reading challenges, as well as work to involve parents, are promoting pupils', including boys', positive attitudes to reading.
- Teachers teach pupils in key stage 1 to apply their phonics knowledge confidently to attempt to spell unfamiliar and multisyllabic words.
- Pupils' work and lessons show that teachers provide pupils with opportunities for

pupils to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics to help pupils achieve a deeper understanding.

- Teachers have sound subject knowledge which they use well to question pupils and extend their thinking. Relationships are positive and there is a culture of mutual respect.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they more effectively hold staff to account to ensure that all groups of pupils make the progress they should, particularly in reading and writing in key stage 2
- they refine aspects of record-keeping to ensure that they have a more cohesive overview of pupils' welfare
- all teachers in key stage 2 teach pupils how to make effective links between reading and writing skills to improve the accuracy of their spelling
- all teachers have high expectations of the quality and presentation of pupils' work and in all subjects
- all teachers use assessment information effectively to match work accurately to pupils' abilities so that more pupils progress to achieve at greater depth
- the governing body is more effective in holding leaders to account for the progress that pupils make, including the use of the pupil premium to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make accelerated progress.

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 Leicester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lawson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, members of the governing body and a representative of the Corpus Christi Catholic Academy Trust. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the day. I met with pupils informally during the school day as well as formally with a group of pupils. I visited six lessons jointly with you. During these visits, I looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils to evaluate the quality of their learning. I also examined their work in a sample of pupils' books with you and one of the assistant headteachers.

I scrutinised a variety of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' attainment and progress, staff performance and leaders' plans for improvement. I considered the 14 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I assessed the impact on standards of leaders' actions taken since the last inspection as well as additional lines of enquiry.