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Mr John Hayes
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Dear Mr Hayes

Short inspection of St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, together with all the staff and governors, have worked hard to ensure that the school's mission statement of 'St Gabriel's is a welcoming school where everyone prays together, cares for each other and learns together' is exemplified and put into practice by all members of the school community. Parents spoken to during the inspection described the school as 'feeling like a family', and this is evident in the care, consideration and mutual respect that is shown by adults and pupils alike.

You have further strengthened leadership in school since the previous inspection through judicious and well-judged appointments. The deputy headteacher, who was appointed in 2014, works effectively alongside you and has led important improvements within the school. He, together with the assistant headteacher, has had responsibility for improving teaching in the key areas of mathematics and English. This has resulted in teaching in these areas that is now much better matched to the specific needs of the pupils and provides stimulating and engaging learning opportunities.

You, together with other leaders in school, have introduced a set of non-negotiable expectations for teachers and other staff. These clearly set out what teachers must include in their planning and the standards of work that are required of pupils. You

have also focused on ensuring that pupils are clear about what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and their attitudes towards learning. This has resulted in high standards of behaviour, both in lessons and at times such as breaktime and lunchtime. Pupils move calmly and sensibly around the school site and older pupils take pride and pleasure in looking after younger pupils.

Pupils' positive attitudes to learning mean that lessons proceed without disruption. Pupils understand the need to listen to the views and opinions of others. This is evident from Reception upwards. Children in the Reception classes were observed during the inspection talking with excitement and interest about their learning with their friends in well-formed sentences. This is a result of the high emphasis that teachers and other staff in the early years provision place on developing children's communication skills.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You, together with other leaders, have ensured that the full requirements of the revised national curriculum for mathematics are in place. There is now a far stronger emphasis on pupils having opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills in problem solving using reasoning, and to use mathematics in subjects such as science and technology. Pupils' outcomes in mathematics have improved over the past three years. In 2016 the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard by the end of key stage 2 was slightly above the national average. This was also the case for the most able pupils, with the proportion achieving the higher levels above the national average.

However, teachers' expectations for the most able pupils are not consistently high in all subjects across the school. This results in some pupils not being set work that is sufficiently challenging. Where teachers use questioning particularly effectively they match the questions accurately to the different needs of pupils in the class and pose questions that require deep thinking. However, this is not consistently the case from all teachers.

Teaching across the school has improved further since the previous inspection. You have taken robust action to address any teaching that was not good enough. You have worked effectively with other local schools to allow teachers to observe and learn from outstanding teaching, both within St Gabriel's and in other schools. Teachers are held accountable for the outcomes of their pupils at termly review meetings where the progress and attainment of each child in the class is discussed in detail.

Governors are an effective force in school. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths but also recognise that there is room for further improvement. They work closely alongside you and other leaders and have good systems in place to compare the school's performance against that of other schools, both nationally and locally.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are robust systems in place in school to ensure that pupils are safe and secure. The work of the school's attendance and welfare officer is particularly effective in ensuring that safeguarding has a suitably high priority in school. Record-keeping relating to individual pupils is meticulous and indicates that all staff are aware of the need to be vigilant to any safeguarding concerns. The welfare and attendance officer is unrelenting in ensuring that outside agencies provide appropriate and timely support for pupils who are at risk. Staff receive regular training on relevant matters, including their responsibilities in identifying if a pupil is at risk and the processes for reporting and recording any concerns. Staff have received recent training in combating extremism and the threat of radicalisation, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.

Inspection findings

- School leaders recognised that last academic year girls had not achieved the same outcomes as boys in some year groups, particularly in writing. They identified that there was a need for a greater focus on developing all pupils' range and understanding of vocabulary, particularly for girls. Leaders have ensured that all classes in key stages 1 and 2 now have regular lessons that extend pupils' knowledge of a far wider range of words. Pupils are well supported by teachers and other staff in ensuring that they understand how to use the extended vocabulary in the appropriate context in their writing. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of the work that leaders promote in school. There are high expectations from leaders of what pupils can and should achieve and these aspirations are shared by teachers and other staff.
- The school curriculum offers a range of exciting learning opportunities through topics. These topics offer pupils the opportunity to apply their skills in English and mathematics across other subjects, such as science, geography and history. Topics are enhanced by trips and visits. School leaders identified last academic year that some topics were not sufficiently engaging for girls and have introduced a number of new topics that appeal equally well to all pupils, regardless of gender.
- Where questioning is used effectively, teachers ask questions well to challenge pupils and to assess their understanding. For example, in a Year 5 writing lesson the teacher set additional, more demanding individual questions for some of the most able pupils, most of whom were girls. This required them to think deeply and to consider their answers before responding. However, where questioning is not used as well, teachers tend to ask general questions of the class and accept responses from the pupils who volunteer answers. This limits involvement and participation from some pupils.
- School leaders have systems in place for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. They use this information to determine the priorities for improvement. However, while leaders have taken appropriate actions to improve outcomes for pupils, information from monitoring and evaluation is not consistently used to identify how the school can improve further. Improvement plans do not have clearly defined success criteria and it is

therefore hard for leaders to fully evaluate the impact of the actions that they have taken.

- Early reading is taught well in key stage 1 through daily phonic lessons that are matched to the different abilities of the pupils. Teachers and other staff accurately demonstrate the sounds that letters make and provide opportunities for pupils to use the sounds to build words. Pupils are then required to use their phonic knowledge to spell words in pieces of extended writing. Teachers place a high emphasis on ensuring that pupils understand what they are reading. Outcomes for pupils in reading are carefully monitored by teachers, and leaders hold teachers to account for the progress that their pupils are making through termly review meetings. The range of reading books has been further extended this year. Pupils are enthusiastic readers who develop a love of reading as they move through the school. Pupils are also well supported in extending their appreciation of reading through visits by authors. As one pupil commented during the inspection, 'It's not often that you get to meet a real author and to get a signed copy of his book.'
- Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in school is good. Pupils' specific needs are identified early on in school and individual support is provided that is well matched to their needs. Links with outside agencies are strong. The school makes good use of advice and expertise from specialists in dyslexia, autism and behavioural problems.
- In 2016 the proportion of pupils in Year 2 who attained the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average. This is because not all teachers set tasks that are sufficiently challenging and require pupils to think deeply.
- Since the previous inspection, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in school have improved and differences between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally have diminished. In 2016 outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in both Year 2 and Year 6 fell and were below those of other pupils nationally. Leaders rightly identified that this was a key improvement priority for the current school year. Leaders have ensured that all teachers now have a clear and accurate understanding of the particular needs of the disadvantaged pupils in their classes. Teachers are required to identify the specific needs of each pupil and to plan and deliver support as appropriate. One-to-one support is provided for pupils as required. The measures that leaders have taken have resulted in improved outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics for disadvantaged pupils who are currently in school. Disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress than other pupils in school and differences in outcomes are diminishing rapidly.
- Additional after-school lessons are provided for pupils and there is a particularly strong emphasis on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils take up these places if appropriate. The school uses the pupil premium funding it receives well. All pupils are offered the chance to take part in a good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including sports, music and arts clubs, and trips to the theatre and the ballet. Funding is used to ensure that disadvantaged pupils can participate fully in these activities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school improvement planning is refined to ensure that there are sharply defined success criteria to measure and evaluate the impact of actions taken
- systems for monitoring the work of the school are refined to more precisely identify priorities for further improvement
- expectations from teachers for the most able pupils are sufficiently high across the school
- teachers use questioning effectively to promote deep thinking from pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I also met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also considered the 48 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and looked at free text comments from parents. Together with you and the deputy headteacher, I visited seven classes to observe learning. I listened to some pupils read. I also spoke with pupils in lessons.

I scrutinised information about children's progress during the last academic year. I considered other documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and the school improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, including policies and checks on staff employed in the school, and checked the school website. I also analysed the range of views expressed by staff through Ofsted's questionnaire about the school and its leadership. I reviewed the views expressed by pupils through Ofsted's online questionnaire.

During this inspection I focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. These were:

- how school leaders ensure that teaching effectively engages girls in their learning and enables them to achieve good outcomes
- the action that school leaders have taken to improve reading outcomes for pupils in key stage 1 and whether teachers and other staff are skilled in

teaching early reading through the use of phonics

- how teachers ensure that learning activities and support accurately match the needs of different abilities within school, especially the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the actions that school leaders are taking to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.