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Ginnette Stevens
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Dear Mrs Stevens

Short inspection of The Holy Family Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 July 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 January 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your decision, supported by governors, to carry out a programme of phased refurbishment of major areas of the school has enhanced the learning environment enormously. The addition of trim trails and a story-telling circle, complete with an impressive story chair, have enriched opportunities for learning outdoors in the school grounds. You have taken steps to enrich the curriculum by introducing more arts activities, and you have enhanced the impact of subject leaders by providing more frequent opportunities for them to monitor teaching and learning in their subjects.

Reading is a strength of the school. In formal assessments at the end of key stages 1 and 2, pupils' attainment in reading has been above, and often well above, the national average for the last three years. In order to consolidate these strong outcomes, you have introduced a new approach to the teaching of reading comprehension. This involves teachers using high-quality, carefully chosen texts, often selected from a list of classic books which broaden pupils' vocabulary. Visits from authors of children's books, together with daily 'drop everything and read' sessions, promote a positive culture of reading which stimulates pupils' interest in books.

Since the previous inspection, you and the governors have coped well with the challenges of retaining and recruiting teachers in an area well known for its high cost of living and the proximity of London salaries. Consequently, there has been a high turnover of teachers and some parents have expressed concerns about this.

Nevertheless, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school is strong and the vast majority of parents are extremely supportive of the school. Many parents commented to me about the friendliness, approachability and professionalism of staff. I spoke informally to parents in the playground and I also examined the views of those who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and used the free-text service. Typical comments included: 'The school is doing an amazing job, I can't fault it,' 'If I have a problem, it gets sorted out straight away' and 'My child has made fantastic progress, and she loves all the extra activities on offer.'

Governors understand the school well and they are not afraid to ask appropriately challenging questions of senior leaders. They worked conscientiously to lead the recruitment process for a new headteacher, following your decision earlier this year to retire. This has resulted in a smooth transition process, which is appreciated by staff, pupils and parents.

Outcomes in writing have been in line with the national average for three years, but pupils do not do as well in writing as they do in reading or mathematics. Leaders are ambitious for this to improve and, since the previous inspection, they have ensured that pupils have more frequent opportunities to practise writing at length. Nevertheless, not all teachers share the same high expectations about what pupils can achieve, and standards of writing vary too much across the school and across different subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that all of the school's staff understand their responsibilities regarding safeguarding. They are vigilant and proactive. You always follow up concerns and maintain detailed records. Governors check safeguarding records and procedures. You have ensured that there is an effective system for checking the backgrounds of all adults who join the school to ensure that they are safe to work with pupils, and this includes volunteers and building contractors. Your pupils feel safe in school and believe that the adults take good care of them. The premises are maintained as a safe environment and pupils are appropriately supervised at all times. The pupils I spoke to informally around the school told me that they feel safe and happy at school. Parents are confident that pupils are well looked after and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- In order to ascertain whether the school remained good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. One of these was about the standards current pupils have reached in reading, writing and mathematics, and what leaders are doing to ensure that high standards are being maintained. In particular, I explored what steps are being taken to further improve pupils' outcomes in writing so that they match the high standards reached in reading.
- In the most recent formal assessments this term, a high percentage of pupils met or exceeded national expectations for attainment in reading and mathematics at

the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. In addition, the percentage of pupils achieving the nationally expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 was extremely high. These outcomes have been similarly strong for the previous two years. Writing results, however, continue to be in line with, rather than above, the national average, despite teachers and leaders providing regular opportunities for writing, including writing longer pieces of work.

- In pupils' books, I saw examples of pupils responding well to these writing opportunities. In Year 4, for example, I saw some exemplary written work in which pupils had used their writing skills to analyse their findings from a science investigation and to evaluate their own learning in a history lesson. I also saw pupils in a key stage 1 class working hard to practise their handwriting and concentrating hard to form each letter correctly. Where written work was well matched to pupils' needs and based on clear assessment information, it presented pupils with a good level of challenge. However, this was not consistent across the school. When I looked in books, I noticed that teachers do not all share the same high expectations, or make the best use of opportunities to promote writing of the highest quality. As a result, too few pupils achieve as well as they could in writing.
- My next line of enquiry was about the early years, and whether children still get off to a good start in the Nursery and the Reception classes. Over the previous three years, the percentage of children attaining a good level of development at the end of Reception has been broadly in line with the national average.
- Staff in the Nursery and the Reception classes work closely together, offering children a very good start. Learning is carefully planned, resources are used well both indoors and in the outdoor area. Children's early language and number skills develop well, and they thoroughly enjoy activities such as making jam tarts and creating posters and invitations for a tea party. They also love experimenting with recipes in the mud kitchen and using dustpans and brushes to tidy up after themselves.
- My analysis of children's work in the early years showed that they make good progress. Leaders check their attainment and progress carefully, using a reliable system of assessing children's starting points and then checking their future learning at regular intervals.
- Next, I looked carefully at the school's attendance information because, in 2018, attendance was slightly below the national average and a high percentage of the pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds had particularly low attendance.
- You have been working hard to improve attendance and there are procedures in place to write to parents and to meet with parents when attendance is slipping. Governors have recently introduced a policy of requesting penalty fines for unauthorised, extended absences. As a result, attendance improved this year, although too many disadvantaged pupils still have attendance below 90%.
- My final line of enquiry was about the quality of pupils' work in subjects other than English and mathematics. The curriculum is carefully planned, with lots of useful information on the school's website to help parents support learning at home. Pupils enjoy their lessons, which include lots of art work led by a skilled practitioner, and they are carefully linked to pupils' learning in other subjects. A

specialist dance teacher leads hip-hop dance lessons every week, which pupils thoroughly enjoy, and Year 5 pupils are receiving expert instruction from the local school sports coordinator so that they can become play-leaders and support structured playtimes with younger pupils. French is taught from Year 1 to Year 6, and the many signs around the school reinforce French vocabulary.

- Nevertheless, I looked at pupils' written work in history, geography and science, and it was clear that the quality and presentation of written work are inconsistent and do not fully reflect the depth of pupils' learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- steps are taken to raise expectations in writing so that a higher proportion of pupils exceed national expectations
- the quality and presentation of work in history, geography and science reflects the depth of pupils' learning
- there is a continued drive to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, especially those at risk of missing school too frequently.

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

Nicholas Rudman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy to discuss the school's priorities for development, and the impact of actions taken since the previous inspection. I met the leaders who have responsibility for science, geography, history and key stage 2 literacy. In addition, I met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and with the Hertfordshire improvement partner. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's self-evaluation document, plans and records for the use of additional funding, and the school's assessment information. I checked the school's safeguarding and child-protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with pupils, and information relating to attendance. I undertook joint observations of learning across the school, looked at work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I analysed the 67 responses to Parent View, as

well as the 34 free-text questionnaire responses from parents. I spoke with parents informally before school and I analysed the responses from 20 staff and 27 pupils giving their views of the school.