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22 March 2019

Mrs Stacy McHale
Principal
St Michael's Catholic Primary Academy and Nursery
Telford Gardens
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Dear Mrs McHale

Short inspection of St Michael's Catholic Primary Academy and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 7 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since the last inspection, there have been several staff changes, including among senior leaders. You have managed these changes and staff absences effectively in order to provide as much continuity as possible for pupils. For example, you have taken the opportunity to provide leadership opportunities and development for existing staff.

You and other leaders are ambitious for the school and reflect on your practice so that the school continues to improve. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning and analyse pupils' progress and outcomes regularly. They are clear about why outcomes are as they are and address weaknesses promptly. You are developing a staff team whose members share good practice through professional dialogue and work closely with each other. Staff are proud to work at St Michael's and appreciate the professional development they receive.

Governors are knowledgeable and supportive of the school. They visit school regularly so that they can see the impact of leaders' actions for themselves. Governors are linked to subject leaders and take a keen interest in developments in subject areas. The local academy committee reports to the multi-academy company (MAC) so that they both have a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses of

the school. The school receives effective support from MAC leaders and its school improvement partner.

The vast majority of parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. They say that their children are safe and happy and enjoy school. Despite a small minority of parents having some concerns about bullying and how the school responds to concerns, inspection evidence, supported by the views of most parents and by pupils, indicates that bullying is rare, and when it does occur is dealt with promptly and effectively.

Pupils behave well in school. They are attentive in lessons and work hard. Pupils speak proudly about their school. Several pupils commented that this is a school where 'everyone is really kind'. They are confident that they can share any worries or concerns with an adult and will be listened to.

You have taken positive action to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. For example, a teaching and learning handbook has been developed with clear principles for staff to adhere to. These are referred to regularly in staff meetings and through the monitoring of teaching and learning. Training has been provided and expectations have risen in relation to the most able pupils applying their skills across the curriculum. A new mathematics scheme was implemented to enable pupils to apply their problem-solving skills more regularly. Regular pupil progress meetings enable leaders to keep a close eye on pupils' outcomes and check that pupils are not falling behind.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strength. Policies and procedures are thorough and rigorous. These are checked regularly by school leaders, governors and the MAC. Staff are well trained and understand their responsibilities well. Staff know to report the smallest concerns. This ensures that there is a strong culture of safeguarding and a high level of vigilance. As a result, the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- In 2018, pupils' progress and attainment in writing dipped below the national average at the end of key stage 2, especially for boys. Boys' attainment in writing was also below the national average at the end of key stage 1. Leaders have ensured that there is a strong focus on the teaching of writing. Pupils have many opportunities to write. They write at length and use ambitious vocabulary so that their writing is interesting to read. The school's 'talk less teaching strategy' places a greater expectation on pupils to work hard and take greater responsibility for their learning. For example, pupils are encouraged to edit their work to improve the quality of their writing. However, although most pupils can write fluently, sometimes, teachers' expectations are not high enough. On occasion, basic errors in spelling and punctuation are not addressed and become embedded over time.

Teachers are not implementing the school's approach to handwriting effectively and as a result the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation is inconsistent.

- Leaders monitor the gap between boys' and girls' achievement closely. Leaders have reviewed their curriculum and have chosen books and texts that inspire boys to write. Intervention strategies in key stage 1 are helping some pupils to catch up, especially boys with poor language skills. As a result, boys are now writing in legible sentences. In most year groups, current assessment information shows that the attainment gap between girls and boys is closing.
- Over time, the proportion of pupils who achieve a good level of development is above or in line with the national average. However, in 2018, this declined, especially for boys. Evidence indicates that this dip was a result of the complex needs of this particular cohort of pupils. Current children in Reception are on track to meet the expected standard. In early years, children are well engaged in purposeful learning. In activities, they cooperate well with each other and take turns. They are beginning to form their letters well. Children develop early writing skills through mark making and handwriting patterns. They have opportunities to practise their writing by creating shopping lists for pancake day or when writing about a giant land snail. Children make good progress and some are beginning to write simple sentences with phonetically plausible words. Leaders have considered topics that might appeal to boys. They have developed the outdoor area to include a dinosaur climbing wall and activities to engage the interest of boys further.
- Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average. However, in 2018, persistent absence increased to above the national average, especially for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders analyse pupils' attendance closely and follow up absence rigorously. The school receives effective support from the MAC education welfare officer, for example through attendance support meetings and plans. As a result, the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent has now fallen below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have high expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation and adopt a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting
- teachers and pupils routinely address basic errors in spelling and punctuation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of directors and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy company, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Cameron
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the vice-principal. I met with the chair and members of the local academy committee. I also met with representatives of the diocese and the MAC. I spoke to the MAC school improvement adviser on the telephone. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and considered the 41 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the 29 written responses. I also considered the 17 responses to the staff survey and the 19 responses to the pupil survey. I spoke to pupils informally during the day.

With school leaders, I observed teaching and learning and reviewed the work in pupils' books. I scrutinised a range of school documents, including the single central record, safeguarding records, behaviour logs, the school's self-evaluation document and the school improvement plan. I observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day, in lessons and in the dining room.