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Mrs Annette Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jones

Short inspection of Saint Mary's Catholic Primary School, Loughborough

Following my visit to the school on 12 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 October 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, leaders and governors have overcome the challenges presented by staff changes and a changing school population.

Yours is a cohesive and caring school community where cultural differences are celebrated. The school's strong ethos promotes values well, and pupils know the importance of respect and tolerance. When I spoke to pupils during my visit, they said that they get on well together. They said they like raising funds to help others and they showed a good understanding of faiths different to their own. Pupils also value taking part in sports and musical activities. Those pupils who are new to the school say that they are made to feel welcome.

Since the previous inspection, you have experienced a rise in the number of pupils who arrive at the school, often mid-year, speaking little or no English. You and your staff accommodate these pupils well and they get off to a good start in learning to speak English. However, in recent years this has had an effect on the overall outcomes for pupils. This is because some newcomers had insufficient time at your school to catch up, or insufficient knowledge of the English language to reach the expected standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 6.

In order to reduce this effect and to raise standards, you and your leaders have made effective changes to the curriculum and ironed out some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. You have established effective assessment systems to check

pupils' progress and you deploy additional staff well to provide extra support for those pupils who need it.

The biggest improvement is in writing. Pupils make good progress and write extensively across a range of subjects. Boys are doing well because they enjoy the subjects that they write about. You have introduced a consistent approach to the regular teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling which pupils, including the most able, use well in their writing.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to ensure that teachers' plans focused on what pupils should learn. You have addressed this well. Teachers tell pupils what they are learning about and what they are expected to achieve by the end of lessons.

You have also addressed areas for development in reading and introduced new approaches to help pupils to gain meaning from what they read. Those pupils who read to me during my visit did so with fluency. Less-able pupils use their learning about phonics to help them to tackle new words. The most able pupils enjoy reading more complex texts but some struggle with interpreting what they read.

In mathematics, leaders' thorough analyses of the curriculum and test results have led to the clear identification of any gaps in pupils' learning. You and your staff have placed a strong focus on improving pupils' arithmetic and this ensures that pupils are making good progress. However, some inconsistencies exist in how well teachers check pupils' reasoning and help the less able and the most able pupils to consolidate and extend their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, together with governors, ensure that policies and systems are fit for purpose. You maintain detailed records of any child protection concerns. You use the good lines of communication with external agencies and families well to address any concerns over children's welfare. You make sure that staff receive relevant training and regular updates so that they know how to keep pupils safe. Vetting procedures for adults who work with children are secure.

Pupils say they feel safe and all of the parents who completed the online questionnaire, Parent View, agree. Pupils receive good guidance on how to stay safe because safety issues are addressed well in the curriculum. For example, learning in history helps pupils to consider racial injustice and intolerance. Trips to outside locations, such as the Danger Zone, help pupils to evaluate risk and learn about potential dangers such as exploitation. Pupils know about the various forms of bullying due to regular online days and anti-bullying weeks. These help pupils and parents to understand how to deal with any concerns that may arise. Leaders use guidance from the local police and the local authority effectively to check pupils' understanding of issues such as extremism.

Inspection findings

- Some curriculum changes and improvements to teaching had not been in place long enough to have a positive effect on pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 in 2016. This, together with new pupils arriving during the year who had insufficient time to catch up, led to standards in reading, punctuation, spelling and grammar, and mathematics being below average.
- Pupils now in Year 2 and in Year 6 are already reaching standards that are higher than those reached by pupils who were in these classes last year. Leaders have modified aspects of the curriculum and raised teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve, leading to good progress.
- Those pupils who did not do so well previously, especially those who are now in Year 3, are catching up well. Leaders and staff ensure a good range of extra support, for those who need it, in phonics, spelling, reading and mathematics. The school's information shows that these pupils are now working at the standards expected for their age.
- Leaders have overcome some inconsistencies in key stage 2 through regular monitoring of the quality of teaching. This has led to well-targeted support to improve weaker practice. As a result, there is a consistent approach to the teaching of English and mathematics.
- Teachers make sure that pupils use what they learn about spelling, punctuation and grammar in their writing. New approaches to the teaching of reading and the clear focus on the development of mathematical skills are paying off. Work in books shows that pupils make good progress in calculation and use their mathematics for a range of purposes.
- There are some aspects of mathematics teaching that are not yet consistently strong. These include the teaching of number facts and providing less-able pupils with enough opportunities to practise their skills in the subject. On occasions, teachers are too quick to supply the answers to questions set. This means that there are lost opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding by getting them to explain their reasoning.
- In some years previously, boys' achievement has been below average. Tasks and topics are now chosen well to motivate boys' learning. Boys I spoke to said that they enjoy writing and 'write lots' because the topics interest them. Boys say there are plenty of interesting books to read in the library and they like the tasks set for them in mathematics. As a result, any differences between the learning of boys and girls are now reducing.
- The most able pupils make at least the expected progress. There are good partnerships with local schools to extend activities for the most able mathematicians. However, leaders recognise that these pupils could do even better in reading and mathematics. Occasionally, the most able do not build quickly upon what they already know in mathematics or have enough opportunities to develop higher-level reading skills such as inference.
- Overall attendance is average. The school has effective systems for checking why pupils are absent from school. Leaders and staff work well with families to ensure

that pupils attend as frequently as they can. Currently, the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school is greatly reduced when compared to previous years.

- The curriculum prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils learn about a range of faiths and people from backgrounds different to their own. They visit places of worship and learn about customs that are important to other people, for example through the school's 'international day'. Pupils learn about key values of fairness and democracy in lessons, on visits and through their roles as school councillors and house captains.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is consistent teaching of number facts in mathematics
- teachers nurture a greater depth of mathematical understanding by encouraging pupils to explain how they got their answers
- teachers give those pupils who find mathematics difficult greater opportunity to practise their skills before moving on to new learning
- the most able pupils quickly build upon what they already know and can do in mathematics and develop higher-level skills in reading.

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

Yours sincerely

Vivienne McTiffen
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I met with subject leaders responsible for English and mathematics. I also met the chair and two other members of the governing body. I visited all the classes with you and observed the teaching of English and mathematics. I spoke to pupils during lessons about their work and I listened to some pupils read. I also met with a group of pupils and looked at work in their books. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and the improvement plan. Together with leaders, I looked at the school's assessment information and attendance figures. I took into account the 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 12 free-text responses from parents. I analysed the 12 responses to the

questionnaire submitted by school staff. I scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks and other documentation relating to safeguarding. The school meets the recommendations on what an academy should publish on its website.