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Mrs Samantha Griffiths
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Dear Mrs Griffiths

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 June 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.**

The number of pupils on roll has almost doubled since the previous inspection. A number of Traveller children have joined the school and there has been significant in-year mobility within some year groups, especially in key stage 2. You have managed the school's growth and the transition of new pupils well. You have maintained the family-friendly and inclusive ethos for all pupils, and parents and carers. As one parent put it, 'My daughter was welcomed to the school wholeheartedly and she has come on in leaps and bounds. I feel this is due to a strong head who leads well and great teachers who always have the children's best interests at heart.' Relationships are very positive between adults and pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy school, behave well and work hard in lessons.

You and your staff are committed to providing good-quality care and education to all pupils. Staff in the school work well as a team and have a detailed knowledge of pupils and their families. They leave no stone unturned to make sure that children are safe and happy at school. You have focused closely on the quality of teaching, but this has had variable impact on pupils' achievement. Weaknesses are beginning to be addressed, but you, governors and the school improvement adviser acknowledge that there is more to be done to ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and good progress for pupils.

You have responded positively to some of the key areas for improvement from the previous inspection report. You have provided ongoing training for all staff, and have shared and accessed examples of good practice both within and outside the school. Together with the assistant headteacher, you provide coaching and mentoring to newly qualified teachers and those who need to improve their practice. However, there has been limited impact in other areas identified, particularly in relation to key stage 2 and the progress overall of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, further improvement is needed to ensure that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding, which permeates the school. All staff and governors undertake regular training and, as a result, they understand fully their roles and responsibilities. Timely referrals are made where concerns need escalating in order to fully protect pupils. You are relentless in your pursuit of appropriate action, taking, as you describe it, a 'bulldog approach' to following up concerns reported. All record keeping is systematic, well organised and stored securely. Robust safer recruitment checks are carried out to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. This is because personal safety is strongly promoted in lessons, assemblies and through projects such as 'Stop, Think, Act, Reflect' (STAR) and 'Speak Out, Stay Safe'. Visiting speakers, including from the police and NSPCC, help deliver and reinforce safety messages. As a result, pupils are confident that they can report issues to adults and that their concerns will be listened to. An excellent example of this was when a pupil reported to their teacher that a stranger had started communicating with them via the internet at home. This made the pupil feel uncomfortable. The teacher informed the parent, who then informed the police. Action taken ensured that this communication ceased. This demonstrates the high levels of trust between pupils and staff and the effective teaching that exists in this area. Parents agree that their children are kept safe at school.

Inspection findings

- Together with governors, you evaluate strengths and weaknesses accurately. You carefully track pupils' progress and monitor provision carefully. Additional adult support and intervention programmes are provided for individual pupils identified as falling behind. This has been successful in ensuring that pupils reach the levels expected in phonics in Year 1 and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2. However, standards and progress rates at the end of key stage 2 have fluctuated since the previous inspection and attainment in mathematics was below average in 2016 and 2018. Unvalidated data also shows that progress and attainment fell in reading in 2018.

- The school's own assessment information for current pupils shows that most year groups are making progress, but only small numbers are making good progress. Not enough pupils in key stage 2 are making good progress in mathematics. Only half of the current Year 6 pupils are working at the levels expected for their age. You are willing and determined to address shortcomings in provision to ensure that pupils are well prepared for high school. You have commissioned support from a school improvement adviser and are compiling a detailed and comprehensive action plan to act on advice received and raise achievement.
- From low starting points, most children in early years make good progress in all areas of learning and the majority reach a good level of development. We focused on how well writing is taught because published data shows that fewer children do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. Teachers model writing well from the outset. Careful attention is paid to how children hold their pencil and tripod grips are provided, where needed, to aid pencil control. Correct letter formation is taught well and children practise this in their writing books or sand trays. Good links are made between reading and writing in phonic lessons. However, limited opportunities exist for children to write independently during child-initiated lessons. This hinders their progress, especially the most able writers, who can already write their name on entry to school. Checks made of children's learning journals show that early teacher assessments are overly focused on capturing evidence for expressive art and design. There is little evidence of prime areas, such as personal, social and emotional development or communication and language. This restricts adults' ability to accurately assess children's starting points in all areas of learning.
- We also focused on the teaching of mathematics for all groups in key stage 2 as progress over time is lower in mathematics than in reading and writing. Visits to classrooms show that staff are attentive to pupils' needs and provide good individual or group support during lessons. Appropriate resources are also provided to help lower ability pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, for example, cubes, number lines and place-value mats. Pupils present their work neatly. There is clear evidence in books of increased problem-solving and reasoning activities to help pupils develop the higher order skills needed to work at greater depth. However, teachers do not systematically pick up and address misconceptions, and work is not accurately matched to some pupils' level of ability. As a result, these pupils find the work too hard, for example, rounding numbers to 10,000 when pupils are not confident in rounding to 10 or 100, or completing a complex two-step problem before having the necessary skills securely in place. As a result, pupils do not make the progress they should.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils across the school, including in early years, needs improvement. Only a third of disadvantaged children achieved the early learning goals last year. You have rightly identified this as a key priority. However, leaders and governors have not evaluated the impact of pupil premium funding received precisely enough. This needs to be addressed urgently so that you can identify which strategies are making a positive impact and where action is failing to make a difference. The school's assessment information shows wide differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils

nationally in some subjects across the school, for example mathematics in current Year 6. Work in pupils' books, together with published data and unvalidated results for 2018, show that very few disadvantaged pupils are working at, or achieve, greater depth.

- Attendance is below the national average over time. Last academic year, attendance was particularly low for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This impedes their progress. There are some effective strategies in place. These include the weekly attendance raffle, writing directly to parents, commissioning an educational welfare officer, prosecuting repeat offenders, and visiting the Traveller site to build positive relationships. These strategies have had some impact on some families, but more needs to be done to reduce persistent absence and encourage regular attendance for targeted pupils.
- Over the last three academic years, the number of fixed-term exclusions has been above the national average. I explored this through discussion with you and through checking behaviour records and talking with pupils and parents. Records are thorough and detailed and show that appropriate action is taken, and the school's behaviour policy is applied fairly. It is evident that some pupils have complex behavioural and emotional needs. Owing to your strong belief in inclusivity, these pupils are extremely well supported in school. Strong relationships are built between staff and individuals and as a result, pupils modify and improve their behaviour. Behaviour observed during the inspection was consistently good in lessons and at breaktimes. Pupils, parents and midday supervisors all agree that behaviour is good. Records also show that incidents have reduced considerably and there were no exclusions last term.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children are encouraged to write independently during child-initiated activities and a greater range of evidence is collected in early years to support teachers' initial assessments of children's starting points
- pupils in key stage 2 make stronger progress, especially in mathematics, so that they reach high standards by the end of Year 6
- the use of pupil premium funding is evaluated rigorously, and disadvantaged pupils make progress at least in line with that of other pupils nationally
- attendance figures improve and are in line with the national average, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Shrewsbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Telford and Wrekin. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteacher, the chair of governors and a school adviser commissioned on behalf of The Bridge Teaching School. I discussed the work of the school, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. Together with school leaders, I observed mathematics teaching in key stage 2, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I also visited Reception class to see how writing is taught. I talked to pupils at lunchtime to gather their views about school and to determine whether they felt safe and the typicality of behaviour.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's own information about pupils' achievement. I reviewed the school's evaluation of its work, together with a report from the local authority. I took account of the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the free-text responses from parents. The school's own survey of parents' views published on the school's website was also considered, in addition to information collected from parents at the end of the school day.