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Mrs Debra McFarlane
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Dear Mrs McFarlane

Short inspection of St Joseph's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment in 2016, you and your more recently appointed senior leadership team have taken effective action to arrest a decline in the quality of education. When you were appointed, achievement over time had been less than good. Too many pupils over time did not reach national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics and not enough children in the early years achieved a good level of development.

You know the school well. You understand its strengths and weaknesses and are open and honest about what needs to be even better. Instability in leadership and among the teaching staff has contributed to a lack of rapid improvements. However, improvements are building in momentum. Senior leaders have not baulked at the difficult challenges. You have identified and tackled weaker teaching and raised teachers' expectations. As a result, teaching is now strong across the school and pupils currently in the school are making much better progress. The senior leadership team has quickly got to grips with areas for further improvement and share your enthusiasm, vision and drive.

Teaching has improved and is effective across the school. The previous inspection highlighted that there was scope for some pupils to make even more progress in reading and writing. Since the last inspection, the attainment in 2018 at key stage 1 and key stage 2 has moved in the right direction and this reflects the improvement in teaching.

The work in books shows that teachers match work to pupils' abilities. Teachers have high expectations and I saw some strong examples of high-quality questioning.

The school is a happy place and there is a strong sense of purpose. Staff and pupils are welcoming and proud of their school. The parents I spoke to were very positive about the school and its leadership. The curriculum inspires pupils and encourages them to become involved in their learning. Pupils described how the Franciscan nuns, who were visiting during the inspection, helped them understand other people's lives and beliefs.

Governors are passionate and care deeply about the education of pupils. The governing body offers strategic direction. A number of governors have undertaken vital training to improve knowledge and understanding about their roles. However, governors have placed too much emphasis on the actions of leaders and not shone a bright enough light on the difference those actions make to pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The record of checks on adults' suitability to work with children is detailed and up to date. The school has effective and rigorous safer recruitment procedures in place. Leaders are vigilant regarding the security of the grounds and school building. Staff are well trained and understand their duties of how and what to report. The introduction of an electronic system has improved the overview of the needs of children who may be at risk of harm. However, leaders need to be yet more meticulous in the records they keep.

Pupils state that they feel safe and listened to by the adults in school. They feel the school helps them to learn how to keep themselves safe and can talk confidently about online safety. They told me that if there is any bullying it is sorted out straight away by adults. They explained that their peers act as 'peacemakers' to help resolve any disagreements.

The vast majority of parents feel their children are happy at school and that pupils are safe. However, a small but significant minority of parents in the Ofsted survey, Parent View, said they did not believe the school deals with bullying effectively. Conversely, a few parents surveyed cited examples of where leaders had been effective when dealing with concerns and the majority feel bullying is not an issue.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have accurately identified the areas for improvement in early years. They spotted that children in the early years were not ready for Year 1 and too few were reaching a good level of development. Adults are now more adept at identifying what children need to learn next and current children are making better progress. Routines are in place and children are settled and confident. The provision is exciting and encourages independence, indoors and outdoors. Teaching is strong and expectations are high.
- Leaders have accurately identified that progress over time in mathematics has not been good enough. Leaders have ensured that action plans focus on improving pupils'

progress. The checks leaders make on the quality of teaching hold teachers to account effectively. The teaching of mathematics across the school is effective and is leading to better progress across all year groups. Assessment is accurate and picks up underachievement quickly. Teachers identify accurately what pupils have learned and what they need to know next. Intervention is swift and bespoke to the needs of individuals, leading to fewer pupils slipping through net. Teaching challenges pupils to explain their thinking, leading to better conceptual understanding. The highly motivated and knowledgeable mathematics leader has engaged the staff, involving them in self-review, not just in the school but with other schools. The leader has engaged in partnership work with outstanding schools to continue to improve practice. The improvements in pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 6 in 2018 reflect the improvements seen for pupils across the age ranges.

- Pupils talk about their learning with enthusiasm. They say, 'Teaching is good and adults explain things if we do not understand something.' They believe their teachers work hard to make lessons interesting. Pupils find the trips and visitors help them get a better understanding of what they are learning. Pupils are well mannered and polite; they hold doors open and walk smartly to assembly. Even the younger pupils are confident and clear about the school's expectations.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a higher proportion of children in the early years reach a good level of development so that it is at least in line with the national average and that an increasing proportion of children exceed some of the early learning goals
- governors are more tenacious in the way they challenge leaders and place more emphasis on the impact of leaders' actions
- leaders and managers are more meticulous in their recording of child protection concerns
- a higher proportion of pupils by the end of key stage 1 and the end of key stage 2 consistently reach at least the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Beverley Riddle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We discussed your evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the actions you have taken to improve the school since your appointment in 2016. I briefly observed teaching with you and your deputy headteacher in most classes. We also looked in pupils' workbooks. I met with other leaders and we looked at a sample of pupils' books.

I met with a group of pupils to ask them what it is like to be a pupil at the school.

I met with a representative of the local authority and governors, including the chair and vice-chair. I examined a number of documents, including the school self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan, notes of visits from local authority officers and governing body minutes and safeguarding documents. I considered 11 responses to the staff questionnaire, 51 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 28 written responses from parents.