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Mrs Lesley Roach
Headteacher
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery
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Dear Mrs Roach

Short inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 3 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide very strong leadership and direction for school improvement. Your senior leadership team and governors share your vision and commitment to pupils developing the knowledge, skills and character to fulfil their dreams. To this end, you implemented a rigorous but necessary programme of change when you were appointed as headteacher in June 2016. Senior leaders have been unremitting in eradicating weak teaching. You have not shied away from making difficult staffing decisions for the long-term benefit of pupils. In this, you have received the full support of governors, the local authority and the archdiocese.

Leaders' ambition for pupils' academic success is a clear feature of the school's ethos. Leaders are just as successful in instilling a real sense of love and happiness within the school. Parents and carers spoke fervently, and at times emotionally, about the help and care you and your staff provide for their children and for them. Parents are just as passionate about the quality of education their children receive. Many spoke about how well their children are learning and the progress they are making. Teachers too received much well-deserved praise. In this multicultural school, parents are particularly appreciative of the work that you and your staff do to ensure that their children respect people's differences. You have consulted and worked effectively with parents to make sure they understand how pupils will learn about the full range of diversity in modern Britain. The success of leaders' work in this area was plain in my discussions with pupils and reviews of their work. There is

no doubt that a culture of love, respect and equality for all threads through the fabric of your school.

When the school was last inspected, leaders were asked to improve achievement in writing and mathematics, especially for the most able pupils. Inspectors also asked leaders to check that pupils were getting enough opportunities to extend writing and mathematical skills in other subjects, and to improve outdoor learning for children in Nursery and Reception. You and your staff have addressed these issues effectively. Since your appointment, pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 has improved markedly, not only in mathematics and writing, but also in reading. In all three subjects, the proportions of pupils attaining a high standard by the end of Year 6 have increased. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at least equals that of pupils of this age nationally. This shows that from starting points that are below typical on beginning early years, pupils make strong progress and are well prepared for secondary school when they leave Year 6.

Leaders check that teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to strengthen their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. Your curriculum leader makes sure, however, that this does not detract from the main subject being studied. My review of pupils' work in history, geography and science showed that this is the case. In history and geography, for example, pupils write about the relevance of different types of historical evidence, while in geography, they explain why the world's oceans are important. Pupils use their mathematical skills to produce graphs and tables of their findings from geographical fieldwork and science investigations.

The outdoor area in early years has been thoughtfully developed and designed to ignite children's curiosity. The area provides good potential for children to explore and learn. You and your new early years leader have plans to further extend the outdoor provision next term. Children make good progress in early years.

Pupils enjoy their learning and present their work beautifully. They think highly of their teachers, describing them as, helpful, fair and 'chilled', which pupils explained means 'not too strict and not too serious'. Pupils are polite and behave very well in lessons and around the school. They demonstrate a mature understanding of the need to respect people's differences. Those I spoke with explained recent learning on neurodiversity and respecting the dignity of people with autistic spectrum disorder. Pupils know there are different types of families and loving relationships.

Your governors are knowledgeable and very much involved in the life of the school. They provide you and your leadership team with the right balance of support and challenge. As such, governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records, including documentation of child

protection cases, pupil absence and pupils taken off the school's roll, are detailed and thorough. All staff, governors and volunteers are carefully vetted to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children. Regular staff training ensures that staff's knowledge of child protection issues remains current. This includes training about extreme issues, such as female genital mutilation and radicalisation. Your records show that staff are vigilant in passing any concerns to the school's designated safeguarding leaders and that these leaders act upon them promptly. The school's designated safeguarding leader wastes no time in seeking professional support and intervention to keep pupils safe. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that pupils get the help they need.

Parents and staff are confident that children are safe in school and pupils agree. Pupils trust the adults who work in school and say they would not be afraid to share any worries with them. Your curriculum educates pupils on how to keep safe, including when using the internet. You have trained some pupils to be e-cadet ambassadors, whose role is to reinforce important messages about online safety.

Inspection findings

- Over the last three years, Year 1 pupils' attainment in phonics and Year 2 pupils' attainment in reading have been well below average. I wanted to explore the reasons for this and find out whether the teaching of early reading is effective. When you joined the school, there were weaknesses in the school's provision for phonics. In 2016, only 17% of Year 1 pupils attained the expected standard in phonics. You took immediate action to ensure that the systematic teaching of phonics occurred every day from the start of Reception. Since then, Year 1 pupils' standards in phonics have improved each year. This improvement has occurred despite the notable proportion of pupils who leave key stage 1 part-way through the year and others who join, some with little or no English.
- In early years and key stage 1, all the hallmarks of effective phonics teaching are now in place. This includes ongoing checks by teachers of how well pupils are learning and swift support for pupils who need to catch up. The positive impact on pupils' outcomes is evident. This year, over 70% of Year 1 pupils have attained the phonics standard. There has also been a notable improvement in the proportion of Year 2 pupils reading at the standard expected for their age. There is no complacency, however. Leaders know that standards can improve further and that a small amount of teaching could be better. The teaching of reading in early years and key stage 1 has rightly been prioritised to enable pupils to learn to the full when they begin key stage 2.
- You and your deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), demonstrated the approaches used to help struggling readers catch up in Year 3. When listening to pupils read and reviewing their writing, it was clear that these approaches are being successful. Pupils are now more competent in using phonics effectively and are developing fluency and expression when reading. Developing pupils' reading skills and enjoyment of reading continues to be a strong feature in key stage 2. Staff in this key stage are trained to teach phonics. They read to pupils regularly so that pupils hear a

good model of the written word. Good-quality texts are in classrooms, the school's library and an outdoor reading shed.

- The impact of historically weak teaching has restricted some pupils' progress. However, leaders' resolute drive to improve the quality of teaching has been successful. Staff turnover has increased during this process but is now much more settled. You and your governors have made judicious and astute staff appointments to support the school's journey of improvement. Parents are supportive of the school's leaders. Parents want stability in staffing but appreciate that leaders' decisions have their children's best interests at heart. Staff morale is high. Staff say that leaders take good account of their workload and are considerate of their well-being. All the staff who completed Ofsted's online survey said that they enjoy working at the school.
- Leaders ensure that the importance of regular attendance is made very clear to pupils and their families. Most pupils attend school regularly and on time. A small number of pupils are persistently absent. You and the school's attendance officer have ensured rigorous systems to tackle this issue. Unexplained absences are followed up on the day they occur. Sensitive support is provided for parents who need help. The school's minibus is used to bring pupils identified as being vulnerable to irregular attendance into school. This work, and the effective links with the local authority education welfare officer, have already helped to reduce persistent absence, but this is still an area for improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Year 1 pupils' attainment in phonics and Year 2 pupils' attainment in reading continue to improve to be equal with, or much closer to, national figures
- persistent absence continues to reduce
- the improvements in teaching continue to embed now that stability in staffing has been achieved.

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

Yours sincerely

Margot D'Arcy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your senior leadership team to discuss leaders' evaluations of the school's work and priorities for improvement. Together we visited phonics sessions in early years and key stage 1 and English in lower key stage 2. Pupils from Reception to Year 3 read to me. I reviewed samples of pupils' work in history, geography and science. I analysed a range of school documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and governors' work.

I met with a group of pupils from key stage 2 and spoke to other pupils informally at lunchtime. I met with representatives of the local authority and the archdiocese and held a separate meeting with four governors. I spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day. I considered 26 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, including six written comments. I took account of 18 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and 116 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.