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Mr M McQueen
Headteacher
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Nicholas Road
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Dear Mr McQueen

Short inspection of Ursuline Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 April 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As a result of your dedicated leadership and strong support from your two very well experienced assistant headteachers, the school has continued to improve. The governing body is well led by the chair of governors, who has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas where it needs to develop further. As a result, governors provide focused support and challenge you to ensure effective management of teaching and achievement.

The school's Christian ethos shines out. Your mission statement, to 'believe, achieve and serve', is embedded well into school practices. Leaders have put in effective strategies to address the poor behaviour of a small number of pupils over recent months. Your 'recognition walls' for good behaviour, displayed in each classroom, ensure that there is a consistency of approach to behaviour management throughout the school. All pupils who I spoke with during the inspection were polite, well-mannered and thoughtful in their responses to questions that I posed. Pupils were quick to open doors for me and, like the adults in the school, were very welcoming. The vast majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that they enjoy learning at the school.

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and to free text were equally positive about the school. A typical response was: 'My experience of the teachers and other members of staff is that they are genuinely interested and personally invested in the development of the children – academically, socially and emotionally.'

At the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that children in early years have more opportunities to write independently. Leaders have been highly effective in addressing this issue. Children in the Reception Year enjoy a wide range of opportunities to write, both indoors and in their outdoor area and across a wide range of subjects. During the inspection, children created blueprints of models that they had built in the construction area. Such activities greatly support the children's early writing skills. As a result of leaders' focus in this area, the number of children achieving their early learning goal in writing has increased over the last three years.

You were also asked to ensure that the teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation is consistent across the school. Once again, leaders have been effective in ensuring that this has been done. Teachers plan lessons carefully, with a focus on developing pupils' skills in these areas. In 2018, published performance information showed that the number of pupils achieving at the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling by the end of key stage 2 was above that seen nationally and has increased considerably over time.

Additionally, inspectors asked leaders to ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to practise their writing skills by undertaking longer pieces of written work in literacy lessons and when they write in other subjects. Teachers have developed provision effectively for pupils in this area. During the inspection, I looked at a broad range of books which showed that pupils now have many opportunities to write at length. For example, in Year 4, pupils produced a detailed and extended piece of writing in their history books about Romulus and Remus. Your school's most recent published performance information at the end of Year 6 shows that the number of pupils who achieved at the expected standard was above that seen nationally.

The final area which inspectors asked leaders to address was the closing of the remaining gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally. I have reported on this in detail as part of the inspection findings.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your school site is safe and secure, the identity of visitors is closely checked and a leaflet on the school's procedures to keep both adults and children safe is available to visitors on entry. Pupils understand the purpose of the coloured identity badges that visitors wear when they visit the school. They know that this system has been designed to keep them safe.

Leaders and governors make thorough checks when recruiting new members of staff. The school's record of checks for staff on appointment is detailed and kept up to date. Leaders audit the school's procedures to keep pupils safe and ensure that any actions identified are addressed.

Pupils spoken with during the inspection understood how to keep themselves safe both in the real world and online. They are aware of the importance of a healthy diet and value opportunities to play sport to improve their health and well-being. 'Pupil safety scouts', who are nominated by every class, play a valuable role in checking the school's procedures to keep pupils safe.

All members of staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that the school deals well with instances of bullying.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I shared with you a number of lines of enquiry. The first considered how effective leaders have been in closing the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally. Leaders look closely at the performance information on disadvantaged pupils and compare this to the performance of other pupils in the school and of pupils nationally. Leaders use this information to ensure that disadvantaged pupils who are falling short of what is expected of them receive additional support in subjects such as English and mathematics.
- Leaders are working closely with teachers to reduce the additional support that disadvantaged pupils need by ensuring that work is well planned in lessons to fully meet their needs. This is showing some signs of success. In 2018, for example, the number of disadvantaged pupils who achieved the expected standard by the end of Year 6 in reading was broadly in line with that seen nationally. However, such achievement is currently inconsistent between classes and sometimes between subjects. This is because leaders' drive to ensure that teachers plan to full effect for the needs of disadvantaged pupils is not yet fully embedded.
- We also looked at ways in which leaders are supporting teachers to increase the challenge they provide in reading, writing and mathematics lessons for the most able pupils in key stage 2, including those who are disadvantaged. Historically, there have been inconsistencies in the quality of teaching which have led to a lack of challenge in some lessons. You are taking action to resolve this issue. As a result, provision is beginning to develop well. Leaders have provided training for teachers in a range of curriculum areas and are working to develop further the range of opportunities within the curriculum to challenge and engage the most able pupils. As a result, work in pupils' books and the school's current progress information are beginning to show stronger progress for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. However, leaders are aware that further time is needed to further embed changes, as currently improvements still remain inconsistent across some subjects and classes.
- You are working effectively with governors, other leaders and staff to enhance your curriculum. This is to ensure that pupils develop their skills even further in a broad range of subjects, including English and mathematics, but also art, drama and music. Staff spoken with during the inspection were very enthusiastic about

opportunities within the curriculum to enrich pupils' learning. For example, they spoke of the opportunity pupils had to make poppies on a local beach as part of their study of the First World War. During the inspection, pupils were enjoying a singing workshop in your 'opera room', which is a highly engaging area which replicates a small theatre. This is in preparation for a whole-school event called 'Ursuline Eurovision 2019'. Additionally, leaders are currently designing a 'creative hub', where pupils can undertake art and design activities. Such developments to the curriculum are ensuring that all pupils, including the most able and those who are disadvantaged, receive learning which excites and engages them and challenges their thinking further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed changes to ensure that an increased proportion of the most able pupils achieve the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2
- they continue to support teachers in preparing work for disadvantaged pupils that meets their needs and challenges their thinking, most notably in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with pupils to gain their views of school life and their understanding of safety. I held meetings with you and your two assistant headteachers to discuss your school's evaluation of performance, improvement planning and safeguarding procedures. I met with the chair of your governing body and two other governors to consider aspects of school leadership and safeguarding. I also met leaders who are in charge of English, mathematics and early years to discuss my key lines of enquiry. I spoke with a diocesan school improvement advisor.

I looked at pupils' progress in books and reviewed documentation, which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and the school development plan. I considered 65 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View, 64 responses to Ofsted's free-text parent survey, 16 responses to the staff survey and 60 responses to the pupils' survey.

I visited one class in each year group, together with you, to observe pupils' learning and visited the opera room to observe a music workshop. I reviewed a range of safeguarding documentation, including a safeguarding audit and the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.