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Mrs Kate Madia  
Headteacher  
Our Lady's Catholic Primary School, Princethorpe  
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Dear Mrs Madia

### **Short inspection of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School, Princethorpe**

Following my visit to the school on 15 September 2016, 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 March 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have successfully tackled that inspection's recommendation to ensure that the most able pupils reach higher standards in writing, and have taken steps to strengthen the school's position further. Evidence gathered during this inspection indicates that the school is on its way to reach increasingly higher standards across the whole curriculum.

Your leadership is excellent. The quality of teaching is consistently good and, at times, is exceptionally strong. Since joining the school in September 2015, you have brought about changes at a remarkable speed. The culture in the school is one where academic excellence is celebrated, behaviour is calm and creativity can flourish. The school has a flavour of theatre and intrigue about it; a place where imagination is fired and all can experience adventure, fun and success. In your school, pupils describe making a mistake as exciting because it provides the opportunity to think again and discover something new. Parents express very positive views about the quality of education and care provided at Our Lady's Catholic Primary. A number of parents travel some distance to bring their children here.

You believe that the school is close to outstanding in its effectiveness. It is not quite there yet. I agree that leadership and management may well have been judged outstanding, if the school had received a full section 5 inspection at this time.

However, the quality and impact of teaching over time and outcomes for all groups of pupils remain good rather than outstanding.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The single central record of checks on staff is up to date and complies with all current requirements. In addition, the procedures for checking on visitors operate correctly and site security is efficient but not oppressive. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and the long-term curriculum plans record how this is woven into the school year. The school's work on internet safety is a particular strength. Throughout the school building, there are plenty of reminders and information for pupils telling them what they can do if they are worried about anything. Pupils say that adults are approachable and they trust them to help if they have a problem.

Parents who spoke with me also praised the quality of care at the school. Several parents described how school staff had gone out of their way to provide extra help and support for pupils at difficult times. All staff display an informed awareness that safeguarding is everyone's business. Bullying or unkind behaviour is uncommon and pupils report that, if it happened, other pupils or staff would stop it. Governors keep a close check on health and safety matters and take such responsibilities very seriously. All say that this is a friendly school where they feel safe and secure.

### **Inspection findings**

- The quality of leadership at this school is excellent. Within a relatively short period of time you have built further on the school's previous strengths and brought about change for the better where it was needed.
- You have high expectations and lead by example. During your first year in post, you appointed two new staff to key positions and have been delighted with the results. In addition, you have made sure that everyone's skills and talents are used to best effect. The quality of teaching across the school continues to be good and, in places, is exceptionally strong. Teachers get the chance to learn from effective practice and receive constructive feedback about the quality of their work. You aim to do more of this in the future. Across the school, you have created a climate of cooperation and trust while also making non-negotiables clear with gentle insistence. The local authority has identified your model of leadership as one that others can learn from. I am not surprised.
- You believe that the school is close to outstanding in its effectiveness. Inspection evidence shows that there is still a little way to go achieve this. While the quality of leadership cannot be faulted and teaching is strong and getting stronger, the academic outcomes for pupils are not yet as high as they could be given pupils' starting points and potential. Progress across the school has recently accelerated and standards for all groups of pupils are on the up. Even so, there is a bit more to do to ensure that pupils' progress is consistently strong and the best it can be across the curriculum.

- Due to the small numbers of pupils in each year group, attainment on entry can vary – sometimes quite considerably – from one year to the next. However, over time, it is true to say that most children start with a level of knowledge and skill that is broadly typical for their age. At the end of the Reception Year, the proportions of children reaching a good level of development have risen year after year and for the past two years have been above the national figures. Consequently, most pupils are well prepared for their move up into key stage 1.
- Up until 2015, pupils in Year 1 did not score particularly highly in the national phonics screening check. In 2016, however, the proportion that reached the expected standard was well above the national figure. The reason for this sudden jump upwards is simple: phonics teaching is now more regular, systematic and effective than it used to be. Teachers plan and manage lessons well and pupils who need extra help to catch up get precise and effective tuition, often on a one-to-one or small-group basis. During my visit, I saw several examples of such support and noted the kind but firm way in which staff kept pupils focused on the task in hand.
- On top of this, there is a culture of reading in the school. Teachers in all classes read to pupils regularly and books are promoted in exciting ways. In one part of the school you have placed some 'mystery' books, wrapped in paper with intriguing messages attached that invite pupils to unwrap them and explore the contents. In class, teaching focuses specifically on developing pupils' reading skills and promoting a love of reading. In one class, for example, the teacher asked key stage 1 pupils to tell her something interesting about the books that they were reading. Responses poured out from everyone; they are clearly used to chatting about books and stories and seized this opportunity to do so with gusto. Indeed, during this inspection, one pupil's enjoyment of reading spilled out as she cried out excitedly, 'Oh, I've just reached a magical bit. Look!'
- Teachers also encourage pupils to see the link between reading and writing and plan effective and imaginative lessons, often using simple but well-chosen resources. In one class, for example, staff used short video clips to kick-start a lesson in which pupils had to think about how to capture and organise key points in a text. Teachers also pose questions that stimulate worthwhile debate about the use of language. In the Year 5 and 6 class, for instance, pupils were asked to consider the following: 'Words and phrases make a text interesting. They are the most important part of a book. Agree or disagree?' Pupils had to think deeply as they listened to one another's opinions and then had to justify their own views, provide examples, or revise their views in light of other people's responses. The quality of discussion was superb and was generated by a simple prompt and effective teaching.
- Pupils also get the opportunity to perform. Outdoor productions of Shakespeare's plays are an annual feature on the school calendar and a choir performs in school and at local venues. Pupils of all ages talk and converse with respectful confidence when with their peers or adults.
- At the end of key stages 1 and 2, standards in reading and writing have been above average over time, although progress rates in writing have tended not to be as good as those seen in reading. Nevertheless, there is evidence from the

past 12 months that progress in both these subjects has improved as teaching has strengthened further.

- In mathematics, standards have also been above average over time and progress across the school has been steady. My checks on the quality of work in current pupils' books and my observations in lessons found that progress in mathematics is speeding up; pupils look to be on track to reach even higher standards than before. In all classes, the quality of mathematics teaching is good. Teachers take time to find out what pupils can and cannot do and then teach them what they need to know. In key stage 1, the youngest pupils were learning about the number five. In one activity they had to work out how to set a dinner table for five people. As they set about this task they called on a range of mathematical language, such as: more than, less than, take one away, add one, two too many, as the teacher prompted them with some well-pitched questions. This attentive, meaningful and fun approach is typical.
- But it is not all about English and mathematics. The curriculum is full of interesting subjects and activities. The school employs an artist in residence and makes sure that high-quality art lessons are a regular feature on the timetable. Science lessons are very much 'hands-on' as pupils carry out experiments, test out ideas and hypothesise. During this inspection, some pupils were explaining what happens when a balloon bursts and why one can squash a plastic bottle when the lid is off, but not when it is on. Simple questions and activities such as this prompt pupils to think deeply and learn much.
- Physical education and sport feature heavily, too. Every day, all the pupils run a mile in the school grounds in order to keep fitness levels up. During the school day and after school, there are numerous sports on offer and more than half the pupils attend at least one sports club. Pupils also get opportunities to compete and be part of a team and have had some success at local tournaments.
- The numbers of disadvantaged pupils at the school are small so it is difficult to draw detailed conclusions from the analysis of data from this group. Even so, it is possible to identify a positive picture. In the most recent unvalidated assessment information, all of the disadvantaged pupils reached or exceeded age-related expectations at the end of Year 6. Through your in-school monitoring activities you keep a close eye on this group of pupils and make sure that anyone at risk of falling behind is given an extra boost. The pupil premium funding the school receives is being used well to help these pupils make the most of school.
- In fact, you and your staff are attentive to the learning needs of all groups of pupils. The recommendation made by the previous inspection to ensure faster progress for the most able pupils has been successfully acted on, although the greatest impact has been seen in the past 12 months. When I spoke with pupils they described how teachers set different levels of challenge called 'good, amazing or awesome'. They also described how, while they have to employ a degree of self-assessment when identifying an appropriate level of challenge for themselves, the teachers make sure that no one gets away without stretching themselves. Work in pupils' books confirms that this is the case.
- It is also worth noting the work that you do to inspire pupils who are at risk of losing interest in education. Through your links with local universities you have

created 'The Brilliant Club'. Pupils who are invited to join this club are given cross-curricular projects and challenges to undertake. Perseverance and success are recognised and rewarded with a graduation ceremony and a very impressive certificate. Photographs in the school hall capture some worthy moments from this effective strategy that helps to keep learning alive for everyone.

- The vast majority of pupils have consistently high levels of attendance and the overall figures for school attendance are above average. A small proportion of Traveller children do miss school more often than other pupils. However, you work closely with families to make sure that any negative effects on their learning are minimised. You are also quick to contact families if anyone does not turn up for school when they should.
- There is an atmosphere of calm self-regulation at the school. Pupils move sensibly about the site and willingly help others without being prompted. They enjoy one another's company and report that bullying does not happen. Older pupils look after younger pupils and can be relied upon to be responsible and to notice what needs doing. During this inspection, I observed some good-natured rivalry as Year 6 pupils discussed their campaign strategy for the soon-to-be-held head boy and head girl elections. These posts are clearly valued by the pupils and promote an understanding of duty, effort and responsibility.
- Pupils look smart and I did not see any pupils who were not wearing full school uniform. At work and at play, pupils speak clearly and confidently and are at ease, but respectful, in all situations.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to accelerate progress for all groups of pupils so that standards rise even higher. In order to achieve this, leaders should do all they can to make sure that staff share and learn from the most effective practice in this school and other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

**Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and your teaching staff. I also met with the school administrator and four governors and had a telephone conversation with a local authority officer. I carried out short observations of teaching in all classes and looked at pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils and listened to some pupils read. I also talked with pupils in lessons, on the playground and in the dining hall. In addition, I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

By the end of the inspection, there were 26 recent responses on Parent View. I took account of these and talked with pupils about how school staff listened to their views. I looked at a number of documents, including: pupils' progress information, the school's own evaluation of its performance, information about the work of the governing body, records of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning, and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe. I asked members of staff and parents about safeguarding matters.