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Mrs Emma Brocklesby
Principal
St Ambrose Catholic Primary
Leswell Street
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Dear Mrs Brocklesby

Short inspection of St Ambrose Catholic Primary

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 2017, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, the school has joined the St Nicholas Owen Multi-Academy Company (SNOMAC). As a result, arrangements for governance have changed. A board of directors and an academy representative committee are now responsible for governance at the school. The chair of the academy representative committee was appointed in April 2017. You were appointed as principal in September 2017. An executive headteacher and head of school led the school since the previous principal left in December 2016. There have been changes in teaching staff since the last inspection, including the appointment of some who are new to teaching.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your staff, directors and academy representatives are ambitious for pupils to do well. The school has a clear culture of caring for every pupil and providing opportunities for their academic, personal and spiritual development. Parents speak highly of the school's ethos and how well their children are cared for. Parents and pupils value the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities that the school provides, including sporting and cultural activities. Pupils' regular contribution to highly successful charity work supports the local community as well as national and international charities.

Academic standards at the school are in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception Year is consistently similar to the national. More pupils achieve the expected standard in

phonics by the end of Year 1 than nationally. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2 are similar to, or better than, national percentages. However, too few pupils achieve at the higher standard. Pupils' progress during key stage 2 compares favourably to national rates of progress.

Senior leaders were asked to improve the school's assessment and tracking systems by simplifying the way assessment information is collected, following the last inspection. Leaders were also tasked with making sure that teachers' assessments provide a clear picture of pupils' progress. Since joining SNOMAC, a new approach to monitoring how well pupils are doing has been introduced. Staff benefited from training in these new approaches. Training made use of expertise that exists within other SNOMAC schools. Opportunities to check that teachers' assessments agree with those made in other schools also take place. These checks reveal that staff are much more confident in making accurate judgements than before. You have started to hold regular meetings with class teachers to discuss pupils' outcomes. These meetings remind teachers of your expectations and identify which pupils are doing well. Teachers also identify where a different approach in class, or where additional support, is required to help pupils learn better.

Improving pupils' writing skills was identified as a particular priority at the last inspection. Leaders have trialled a variety of ways to achieve this. They have adopted an approach that develops and reinforces key literacy skills. Staff have received training in how to make the school's approach consistent and effective. The success of the school's response to this priority is evident in pupils' outcomes. For example, the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in writing by the end of key stage 2 has improved this year. Leaders' analysis suggests that pupils' progress in writing by the end of key stage 2 is also set to improve, although calculations to determine national rates of progress for 2017 are not yet finalised.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has clear processes in place to safeguard pupils. These processes are robust, effective and fit for purpose. Leaders make sure that adults who work at the school are vetted appropriately to check that they are suitable to work with pupils. Leaders have clear expectations of staff's collective responsibility to keep pupils safe. These expectations are reinforced to staff through frequent training and updates. As a result, there is an established safeguarding culture, and staff are vigilant. Leaders responsible for safeguarding make sure that additional support is provided for pupils who require it. They check that actions taken by external agencies are timely and effective.

Pupils are confident about ways to keep themselves safe in a variety of different situations, including when using the internet and when near roads. They are confident that they would share any concerns about their welfare with adults at the school. Pupils also know of other organisations they could turn to if they feel unsafe. Parents and staff agree that pupils are safe and well cared for at the school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders accurately evaluate the school's effectiveness using a variety of evidence. You have identified clear key priorities to further improve the school. Your action plan details clear steps for leaders to take. As a result, staff are clear about leaders' areas of responsibility. You are currently working with the school's improvement partner to describe more precisely the outcomes you expect.
- Directors and academy representatives receive regular information about the school's progress. They check this information against the school improvement partner's independent reports. Directors have established clear systems and procedures that challenge and support school leaders appropriately. Academy representatives visit school regularly to check the impact of leaders' actions.
- You continue to address the area for improvement identified at the previous inspection to improve the school's tracking and assessment systems. You are establishing a new system of tests to further validate teachers' assessments. Leaders will use this additional information to monitor pupils' achievements and to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching.
- Teachers have responded well to training about providing additional levels of challenge for pupils with high prior attainment. Teachers plan a range of learning tasks which take into account pupils' progress during lessons. However, some teachers do not always judge accurately, or respond promptly, when pupils are ready to move on to more difficult work in class. As a result, some pupils are not sufficiently challenged to progress their learning to greater depth. Consequently, too few pupils have achieved higher standards and so make less progress than they could. For example, in 2017, pupils with high prior attainment appear to have made lower rates of progress than pupils with similar starting points nationally by the end of key stage 2. However, national data for 2017 is not yet fully validated, so the extent of this difference is not yet finalised.
- You make sure that there are clear procedures in place to identify pupils who require additional support. Leaders who are responsible for safeguarding, special educational needs and nurture interventions regularly share information. They make sure that the needs of pupils who may be vulnerable are accurately identified and addressed. There is a strong culture in the school of making sure that pupils are well supported and cared for.
- Leaders ensure that a range of strategies are specifically targeted to meet the needs of pupils who require additional educational or pastoral support. Leaders identify strategies for class teachers to support these pupils in lessons. Specialist staff also provide a range of additional support when appropriate. For example, small-group work in mathematics develops pupils' confidence and reasoning skills. Despite the extra provision that these pupils receive, too many still do not make similar rates of progress to their peers. Leaders have not evaluated sufficiently well the impact of the additional support these pupils receive. As a result, strategies which are less effective are not changed quickly enough to support pupils better. This contributes to the slower progress these pupils make.
- Leaders regularly analyse pupils' attendance and identify those whose absence is concerning. In the past, absence rates for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who

have special educational needs and/or disabilities were too high. Staff now promptly contact parents to share their concerns and discuss strategies to improve attendance. Leaders' analysis of attendance last year shows the success of these strategies. The number of pupils who were routinely absent from school reduced fourfold during the year. You have identified that maintaining a high profile on regular attendance is important, so it remains a key priority for the future.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils who achieve higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics improves
- additional strategies used to provide extra support for pupils are thoroughly evaluated to ensure that they are effective.

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

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with senior leaders to review the school's self-evaluation and development plans and agree lines of enquiry for the inspection. I met with other leaders and staff, including those responsible for safeguarding in the school.

I met with three members of either the SNOMAC board or academy representative committee, including the chair of the board of directors and the chair of the academy committee. I spoke with the school's improvement partner who is commissioned to work with the school by SNOMAC.

The principal and vice-principal joined me on a learning walk in key stages 1 and 2, where we observed learning, looked at work in pupils' books and spoke to them about their learning. Pupils also gave me their views on the school when they spoke to me during a formal meeting and at social times.

I took the views of school staff into account through the nine responses to an inspection questionnaire for staff. The views of parents were considered through 27 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and informal conversations with parents at the start of the school day.