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Miss D Ridyard
Headteacher
St Joseph the Worker RC Primary School
Cutnook Lane
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Dear Miss Ridyard

Short inspection of St Joseph the Worker RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 May 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 the school was judged to be good in November 2011.

Since the previous inspection, both you and the deputy headteacher are new to your roles in the school.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and staff know the needs of each pupil in detail and use this knowledge to good effect. The quality of teaching over time is consistently strong and pupils are learning well. Children gain a good start to their education through the Nursery and Reception classes. By the time that pupils leave key stage 2 for secondary school they are ready for their future learning. Pupils at St Joseph the Worker develop as confident, polite citizens who feel good about themselves and their education. Staff, parents and pupils believe in you and what you are aiming to achieve for the community of Irlam. A typical comment from a member of staff is, 'The headteacher's leadership inspires staff to be the best they can.'

Over recent years, you have successfully managed a number of extensions and changes to the school premises. Such are the extent of changes that the governors know you always have your eye on how funding can be used to improve the school even more. As a result, the school is becoming an increasingly popular choice with local parents. The number of pupils on roll is rising year on year. Staff cope well with the addition of new pupils during each term.

A central strength of the school remains how well the Catholic ethos shapes the life of pupils, staff and governors. Pupils develop a strong understanding of Christianity and the importance of love, respect and community. The school is a calm, happy place for learning. Pupils engage very positively in activities and they are proud to attend the school. Pupils now enjoy learning as varied as gardening or role playing joining the armed forces to serve and travel to France in the First World War.

You have high expectations of staff, pupils and parents. You are unafraid to challenge families when social media are used to express views about the school rather than through contact with school leaders. Staff and leaders keep parents very well informed about their children's schooling and their learning. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and the only current concern is that, for some, the amount of homework set for pupils is much greater than when parents themselves were young.

Since the previous inspection, you have improved the teaching of writing. For example, in 2016 pupils in key stage 2, including disadvantaged pupils, achieved much better than their peers nationally in their writing. Even so, we discussed that in geography and history, pupils are not always writing well and some of the most able pupils are not being challenged enough. Over time, pupils' reading skills are not improving as fast as their learning in other subjects. This remains a school priority and one which is well planned and pursued by staff and leaders.

Some successful work is undertaken to deepen pupils' knowledge of the diversity of modern Britain and the wider world. Importantly, following some recent work across classes, pupils have a well-informed understanding and respect for Jewish people and their beliefs. Nevertheless, some pupils do not have a clear understanding of the culture of modern Britain or the faiths celebrated by some of the largest communities.

At the previous inspection, inspectors recommended that the school improve provision for early years children to learn outdoors. Inspectors recommended also that the school increase the amount of time for Reception children to access such opportunities. The quality of resources and equipment in the outdoor area has been transformed and they are of a high standard. Nursery and Reception children have access to a wide range of activities outdoors and are supported skilfully in their learning by staff.

Although early years staff give much attention to children's physical abilities and their motivation for writing, some activities used to develop children's writing do not challenge them enough. While books for children to select and read for themselves are shared well in the Reception class, the provision of books in the Nursery is not resourced or presented successfully.

Safeguarding is effective.

Throughout the school there is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe and protected. Training for staff is regular and supported by frequent discussions and the sharing of up-to-date information. Contact with other agencies in support of pupils and families is prompt and regular. Governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously and a specific committee meets regularly to check this aspect of the school's work. Parents and

pupils benefit from many opportunities to learn how to stay safe. Pupils feel safe at school and know how to report any concerns they may have. They say staff act quickly to tackle any issues that arise. The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Nevertheless, school records of the frequent contact with other agencies do not log all information clearly and systematically. The many well-established safeguarding practices and procedures in place show that this issue does not indicate wider weaknesses.

Inspection findings

- The teaching of writing in key stages 1 and 2 now makes much better use of fiction and non-fiction books to stimulate pupil's enthusiasm for writing. Much careful thought is given to linking writing with reading activities. Pupils are learning to make skilled use of a rich range of language in their written work. Such has been the turnaround in pupils' passion for writing that an after-school writing club for Year 3 pupils was extended due to popular demand. More current pupils across year groups are becoming skilled writers than in the past. Leaders are introducing new ways of teaching so that pupils gain the spelling skills they need to succeed as writers. It is too early to see the impact of this change but clear plans are in place to review and refine this work. You acknowledge that the next step is to build on the current rise in pupils starting to write at greater depth to challenge the most able pupils even more. You recognise also that pupils need more opportunities to write in geography and history activities.
- The teaching of reading is improving steadily across the school. Resources for learning are much improved. Staff training is more detailed and frequent. Leaders are checking and supporting the work of staff more successfully. Teaching assistants and teachers are becoming more skilled and confident in teaching phonics. Leaders are making sure that new reading scheme books, and other books in classrooms, are matched well to pupils' abilities. Teachers plan activities with increasing care to engage pupils in saying the sounds that letters make. Pupils in Year 1 did not meet national expectations for their phonics skills in 2015 and 2016. School information shows that pupils currently in Year 1 are doing much better in learning to read. In Year 2 and Year 6 the proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, who are on track with their reading skills is beginning to rise.
- Children achieve well in the early years and make good progress. They are becoming skilled, confident and happy learners who enjoy talking, investigating and solving problems. The transformation of the outdoor area since the previous inspection gives children first-rate opportunities to develop their language, scientific, creative and physical skills. Staff make good use of opportunities to play with and alongside children, for example to help question what might happen as they make mud pies in the mud kitchen. Nonetheless, children cope too easily with some of the writing activities set for them indoors. Furthermore, the provision of fiction and non-fiction books to support children's learning in Nursery is not good enough. These weaknesses risk holding children back from developing even better writing and reading skills.
- Pupils are respectful of differences between themselves and others. Several pupils enjoyed singing at a recent national event to promote peace, unity and tolerance between different groups of pupils in the UK. While pupils benefited greatly from a

recent focus on Judaism and were inspired by their learning, they do not hold a similar level of knowledge about other major UK faiths such as Islam and Hinduism. Some, but not all, of the pupils with whom I spoke could tell me about British culture. Pupils do know about the recent UK government decision to leave the European Union and wider world events such as the election of the new President of the United States.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils benefit from even greater opportunities to learn about the culture and faiths of different people and communities in modern Britain
- teaching gives pupils more opportunities to write in geography and history and that the most able are challenged fully to develop their writing skills and knowledge
- children's writing activities in the early years are always worthwhile and meaningful and that the provision of books in the Nursery is enticing and well resourced
- records of the safeguarding of pupils include a clear log of information and contact with other agencies.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders to discuss your reviews of the school and your plans for improvement. You and I observed pupils' learning in some classes, spoke with pupils and considered examples of their work. I met with a representative of Salford local authority to discuss their reviews of the school. I met with six members of the governing body, including the chair. I spoke to some parents, including a further governor, as they brought their children to school. I reviewed 23 responses from parents to the online Ofsted survey, Parent View. I considered five responses from staff to an Ofsted questionnaire. I spoke with a randomly chosen sample of eight pupils from key stage 2 about their learning and their views of the school. I considered a sample of school safeguarding records and reviewed checks made by the school on the suitability of adults to work with pupils.