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Mrs Kathryn Thomas
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Thomas

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

A genuine sense of care and community is reflected in everything the school does. The well-being of pupils is central to your vision, as the headteacher, and in realising this you are well supported by leaders, staff and governors. The attention given to pupils' personal development underpins the strong engagement and positive behaviour of pupils. They work diligently in lessons and offer support and help to each other. As a result, pupils enjoy school and seek to benefit from all the school has to offer.

Those pupils who spoke to me were very positive about the school. All were keen to emphasise the way the school made them feel welcome and part of the school community. Nearly all of the parents who completed Ofsted's online survey (Parent View) held similarly positive views. Parents frequently commented that staff show high levels of care and support for their children.

You have realigned roles within the leadership team to accommodate changes in staffing. Your self-evaluation shows you have a strong and accurate grasp of the school's strengths and the areas which need development.

You have overseen particular success in bringing about improvements in writing in Year 6. Together with support from teachers with subject expertise, pupils receive

constructive feedback to help them to reflect on their work and improve it as a result. Similarly, in the Reception Year, children are enthusiastic about mark-making and early writing. They confidently attempt to write words in their play, which includes making models and sending messages in envelopes they have made and sealed themselves. Across the school you have correctly identified that this strong progress is not consistent in all classes. Pupils' work shows there is further to go in developing writing, particularly in Key Stage 1. This includes encouraging pupils to have their own ideas and write using their own imaginations.

Safeguarding is effective.

Where pupils are vulnerable or at risk, the school takes effective action to support them and works with other agencies to make sure pupils are kept safe. Staff are vigilant and mindful of the potential dangers to pupils. As a result, both pupils and parents fully agree that the school keeps pupils safe. This positive view of the school is also reflected in the improving rates of attendance and pupils' very positive behaviour. You keep a watchful eye on the small numbers of pupils who are persistently absent and offer appropriate support to enable them to attend more frequently. Comments from pupils confirm leaders' views that bullying is rare and that pupils behave very well, both in lessons and at playtimes. Pupils' understanding of most forms of bullying is good and they are well supported by anti-bullying coordinators. They are confident that any concerns are listened to and they do report these through the 'worry box'. However, they are less well informed about homophobic bullying and older pupils report hearing derogatory language in school. This is not recorded in school logs and leaders accept that this needs to be included.

The leadership team has ensured the day-to-day safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders accept that some administrative aspects and compliance with all aspects of legislation should be sharpened.

Inspection findings

- You, your staff, governors, pupils and parents are rightly proud of the caring ethos, rooted in Christianity, which characterises the school. Staff morale is high. All involved in school life show respect for one another and, in this positive environment, pupils behave very well and develop very positive attitudes towards learning. Pupils' personal and social development is carefully planned to emphasise aspects of respect and responsibility. Pupils learn about different cultures and faiths. They know they should respect others' differences but their learning about wider aspects of different families and diversity in modern Britain is not as strongly developed.
- Observations and scrutiny of pupils' work confirm that pupils work hard in their learning. They engage enthusiastically in the tasks they are given, which become increasingly challenging for older pupils. In the strongest examples, teachers challenge pupils to think hard and give them interesting problems to solve. In the best teaching they do so with real relish! You are clear, however, that this

practice is not as consistent as it could be. In mathematics, for example, pupils' work confirms that, occasionally, the challenge, support and feedback pupils receive does not give them enough opportunities to think for themselves and reason mathematically.

- Children make a rapid start to their learning when they join the Reception class. At that point, their skills and understanding are broadly typical for their age but by the end of the Reception Year the proportion of children who reach a good level of development is above average. By the time they left the school in 2015, a good proportion of pupils achieved higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics in the end of Key Stage 2 national assessments. Although they make expected progress, in Key Stage 1 and in some Key Stage 2 classes, pupils' books show that progress could be further improved with greater challenge for pupils.
- The governing body is well organised to play its strategic part in the leadership of the school. Governors have a good grasp of their role, in part because they attend pertinent training and are highly committed to serving the school community as well as possible. The wide range of skills they bring from their respective experiences, including accountancy, health and safety, social work and special educational needs, also contributes to their effectiveness. A culture of openness ensures that you keep the governors well informed. They challenge you robustly, and minutes of governing body meetings indicate that they are keen to ensure pupils do as well as they can in all aspects of their development. The governors recognise that their partnerships within the Holy Spirit Trust are 'a work in progress' and that some administrative aspects and compliance need sharpening. Work is already in progress with the trust to address these.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that they:

- further improve the consistency and pace of pupils' progress by ensuring the teaching and support they receive challenge them to think for themselves and develop their ability to reason mathematically
- sharpen procedures to check that administrative aspects and issues of compliance are fully met
- extend the positive work on respecting rights and responsibilities to include all groups required by legislation, and ensure any derogatory language is carefully logged and addressed.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Hallam, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Rotherham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Guy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I was able to discuss the work of the school with you and your acting deputy headteacher. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community and looked at staff and parent questionnaires. I observed and spoke with pupils during lunchtime and at other times during the day. Discussions with a representative of the Hallam Diocese and five school governors helped to provide additional information. School documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website were taken into account. Alongside you, I was able to visit most classrooms to observe teaching and learning, and to consider the progress made by pupils through scrutiny of work in their books.