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Mr David Ramsay
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ramsay

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Great Ecclestone

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Your leadership has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide clear direction for the school and share your vision effectively with staff and governors. You have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school, including individual pupils' needs, because of your improved monitoring. However, you recognise that you can improve your checks on the impact of your actions on different groups of pupils over time.

Your development plan is well structured and contains the right priorities and actions to bring about improvement. Governors and staff share your ambition and together you ensure that the quality of education that pupils receive continues to improve.

Carefully targeted training has improved teachers' understanding of the new curriculum requirements for writing and enhanced their skills in how to teach it. As a result, teaching now systematically develops pupils' writing skills. Teachers seize opportunities to make writing fun and engaging for pupils. They make good use of the opportunities that other curriculum subjects provide for pupils to apply and practise their writing skills.

Regular meetings between teachers in this school and others across the local cluster of schools check the accuracy of assessments. Consequently, pupils make stronger progress and achieved higher standards.

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and that learning is fun and exciting. They say that teachers and pupils work together to make everyone welcome and ensure that they succeed. Pupils receive appropriate challenge in the work set for them in nearly all subjects, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. However, work in the most able pupils' books shows that they have more limited opportunities to deepen their knowledge in history.

Safeguarding is effective

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are secure and are followed diligently. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. All staff receive thorough training on safeguarding and are vigilant about the potential risks that pupils may face.

Governors have appropriate monitoring and filtering arrangements in place for the school's internet connection, and effective online safety procedures. Pupils know how to keep safe while using technology because of the teaching and guidance they receive.

Inspection findings

- The school development plan has an appropriate focus on improving pupils' writing by developing their strategies for spelling and developing the rigour of assessment and monitoring in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics.
- Governors have good professional skills and insight, which they use effectively to monitor the work of the school. They often ask probing questions to challenge you and ensure that the school continues to improve. Governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, based on good-quality information in your reports to them. They frequently visit the school to see pupils and staff at work and use these visits well to check the accuracy of the information they receive. Governors regularly check the information they publish on the school's website and retain detailed records of their audits.
- You make effective use of the support and guidance purchased from the local authority's advisory services to provide you with additional challenge to help drive improvement.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is currently at the national average. You closely monitor all absences and follow them up tenaciously when necessary. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and find it difficult to recollect any incidents of bullying. Pupils say that teachers and other members of staff are always willing to help them learn and to quickly sort out any falling-out between friends.
- Teachers and other adults have high expectations of pupils and in-depth knowledge of each individual's strengths and areas for development. Teachers use this information well to plan learning and provide appropriate challenge for pupils, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Staff use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and develop their abilities to explain confidently the reasoning behind their answers. The systematic teaching of

mathematics effectively develops pupils' skills, which they apply in a range of interesting contexts.

- The most able pupils receive appropriate levels of challenge that allow them to develop and deepen their understanding of their learning in nearly all subjects. However, work seen in pupils' history books shows that opportunities for the most able to deepen fully their understanding of the topics being taught and apply more complex historical research skills are more limited.
- Reading is taught well. Pupils read frequently and quickly develop their fluency and a love of books. Participation in book-review activities provides older pupils with appropriate challenges that develop their evaluation skills well.
- Pupils respond well to the good quality of teaching they receive and they have excellent attitudes to learning. They are articulate and eager to contribute to their lessons. Pupils enthusiastically explained to the inspector what they were learning and how teachers helped them to improve. They are polite, well mannered and proud of their school, which they view as one learning family.
- Children enter the school with a range of levels of development. The very small numbers in each year group mean that the analysis of achievement of these groups is not statistically valid. However, the school's records and current work in book show that pupils make good progress from their starting point across the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they more closely evaluate the impact of their actions to improve the achievement of different groups of pupils by making better use of the detailed information collected about individual pupils' progress and attainment over time
- improve the quality of teaching in history, to ensure that most-able pupils' historical research skills improve and their knowledge deepens.

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

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, some teaching staff and governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with the adviser from the local authority who works with the school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school. I took account of the information contained within responses to the online questionnaires for parents.

I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning, looked at their work in books and listened to some pupils read. I reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and action plans and looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, recruitment checks and record-keeping.