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Dear Mrs Ruthven

Short inspection of St Monica's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with senior leaders and members of the governing body, you have sustained the school's high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Parents and carers, who spoke to me informally at the start of the day, typically told me that the school community was 'like a family'. Pupils' consistently high attendance rates reflect the very clear messages you communicate about the importance of attending school regularly and on time. You have established free daily breakfast for all pupils to help them enjoy the best possible start to the school day.

Pupils in Year 6 spoke enthusiastically about taking responsibility as prefects. They enjoy looking after the younger pupils. Through very close links with the local parish church, and learning about the customs and festivals of a wide range of cultures and faiths, pupils are encouraged to show respect and tolerance towards others. Charity fundraising for a variety of causes, including the local food bank, nurtures pupils' generosity of spirit. All this, together with inspiring events such as the school's annual 'balloon release for peace', ensures that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be strongly fostered.

Since the previous inspection, the school has opened additional provision for children aged two years. Parents made a point of telling me how much their children learn at this toddlers' provision. They told me their children enjoy attending. Outcomes for children at the end of the Reception Year have improved since the previous inspection. The proportion of children who are well prepared for

the start of Year 1 has been above average for the last three years.

The previous inspection found that there was more work to do to make sure that the most able pupils were set demanding work. Ensuring that all teaching staff asked pupils challenging questions was also a priority for improvement. Through effective training for all staff, you successfully addressed these issues and increased the proportions of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, attaining high standards at the end of Year 6 in 2015. You have introduced the teaching of Latin in Years 5 and 6 so that pupils are encouraged to think hard about the structure of sentences. In 2016, the attainment of all groups of pupils in Year 6 assessments in English grammar, spelling and punctuation was high. Even so, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 in 2016 reaching the highest standards diminished compared with national averages. Rightly, leaders and governors have identified this as a priority for improvement this year, particularly in reading and mathematics. Leaders have already taken swift action to improve outcomes. This includes making changes to the curriculum and providing additional support to develop pupils' learning at greater depth.

You have made sure that pupils take greater responsibility for meeting their individual learning goals than they did at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils regularly check for themselves how effectively they make progress towards their personal targets. Pupils demonstrate a mature approach to learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and senior leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture at the school. Staff benefit from up-to-date training and are confident to recognise signs that a pupil may be at risk from harm. They know how to identify signs of possible harm, including that a pupil may be at risk from child sexual exploitation or female genital mutilation. Staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe and have a good knowledge of the most up-to-date statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State. They know what the school expects them to do should any concerns arise. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Records show that swift action is taken when necessary. Leaders with specific responsibilities for safeguarding work in close partnership with outside agencies to keep pupils safe from harm.

You provide support for parents to help them know how to keep their children safe. For example, leaders organise workshops for parents on how to keep safe when using computers.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of contexts as staff regularly discuss this with them. Pupils know they are too young to use social media and know what steps they should take to keep themselves safe online. Pupils know what constitutes bullying. They are confident that any incidents of bullying are dealt with robustly, as the school's records show.

Inspection findings

- Children achieve consistently well in reading in the early years, making a good start in learning phonics. However, pupils have not made as brisk progress in building on reading skills in key stage 1. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has varied from year to year since the previous inspection. More pupils compared with the national average reached the expected standard in the check in 2015. However, in 2016 fewer pupils, including fewer disadvantaged pupils, reached the expected standard compared with the national picture.
- This academic year, you have increased the time pupils spend reading each day. Leaders have provided additional training for staff and developed a consistent and systematic approach to teaching early reading in key stage 1. You regularly evaluate the quality of phonics teaching and how successfully pupils make progress. The school's assessment information shows that the steps you have taken are already securing better outcomes than in the recent past. All groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are making stronger gains in phonics as a result of these improvements to teaching, learning and assessment.
- Even so, the least able readers are not confident in using their knowledge of letters and sounds to read unfamiliar words and there is more work to do to increase their confidence in this respect.
- You have wasted no time in identifying and addressing the issues underlying the reduction in the proportion of pupils attaining the highest standards by the end of Year 6, particularly in reading and mathematics. You have developed the curriculum by introducing a new approach to reading that builds pupils' key skills, such as interpreting and drawing conclusions from what they read. Pupils now start each day with reading sessions that develop these skills. Selected pupils also benefit from additional sessions in reading as well as in mathematics to encourage them to develop their understanding in greater depth. The most able pupils who read to me were fluent and confident readers. They told me how much they enjoyed reading for pleasure. They were very positive about the motivating books you provide in the school library and in classroom book collections.
- Senior leaders check the progress that all pupils make very regularly, including the proportions of pupils on track to attain high standards. Information showing the progress of pupils currently at the school, and work in pupils' books, suggests the changes to the curriculum and teaching made this year are having a strong impact.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- least-able pupils in key stage 1 develop confidence in using phonics to read new words when they meet them for the first time
- they continue to develop pupils' learning at greater depth.

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

Yours sincerely

Madeleine Gerard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- whether leaders' actions are effectively improving pupils' outcomes in phonics and early reading
- how successfully leaders' actions are ensuring that the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, reach the highest standards by the end of Year 6, particularly in reading and mathematics.

The inspector carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection:

- meetings with you, and with members of the senior leadership team
- a discussion with three governors including the chair of the governing body
- visits to classes in the early years provision, key stage 1 and key stage 2, to observe teaching and look at pupils' work
- conversations with pupils informally
- evaluation of recent information about pupils' academic outcomes and a range of documentation provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans
- listening to pupils reading in key stage 1 and Year 6
- evaluation of records about keeping pupils safe and about attendance
- informal discussions with parents in the playground at the beginning of the day and consideration of the views of seven parents from Parent View, the online Ofsted survey tool. The analysis of the school's own recent survey of parents' views was also considered.