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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Mark Nolan
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Scarisbrick
Hall Road
Scarisbrick
Ormskirk
Lancashire
L40 9QE

Dear Mr Nolan

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Scarisbrick

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team 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 because of your improved monitoring, and you use this knowledge well to plan the right actions to bring about improvement.

Since the last inspection, you have improved the quality of teaching of most-able pupils and the guidance all pupils receive to help them improve their work. Additional training for teachers and teaching assistants has ensured that pupils of all abilities, including the most able, now receive appropriate challenge, which promotes their learning well. Consequently, most-able pupils make strong progress and achieve highly, particularly in reading and writing.

Your review of the school's guidance and feedback policies has ensured that teachers' practices are more consistent across the school. Pupils now receive better guidance on how to improve their work and more frequent opportunities to use that guidance to improve their understanding and knowledge. You use carefully considered performance management objectives effectively to hold teachers closely to account for the impact of their actions on pupils' learning.

You recognise that the progress pupils make in mathematics is relatively weaker than that in reading and writing. Consequently, you have identified the improvement of mathematics teaching as a key priority in your well-written school development plan.

You have provided additional training for staff to improve the teaching of mathematics. Consequently, teachers and teaching assistants have improved their knowledge of the new curriculum requirements in this subject and have developed their teaching skills, particularly those relating to problem-solving.

Teachers have in-depth understanding of their pupils' skills. They use this information well to plan appropriate challenge and make learning interesting. Additional teaching staff provide support and challenge for pupils in small groups that allows them to catch up or deepen and extend their knowledge and understanding. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and their progress is accelerating. However, you recognise that further work needs to be done to ensure that higher proportions of pupils attain greater depth.

Pupils' attendance is below the national average because of the frequent absence of a small group of pupils. This is often due to unauthorised term-time holidays. Leaders have taken appropriate actions to begin to address this issue, including increased monitoring of pupils' attendance, greater challenge to parents whose children do not attend regularly and the introduction of a range of rewards for good attendance. These actions are beginning to have some positive impact on individual pupils' attendance. However, leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils attend more regularly and do not miss learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are robust and are followed meticulously. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. All staff have received relevant training on safeguarding requirements and are vigilant about the risks their pupils may face.

The school has appropriate monitoring and filtering in place for its internet connection and effective online safety procedures. Pupils know how to keep themselves and their friends safe, particularly while online, because of the quality of teaching they receive.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that teachers quickly and effectively deal with any fallings out.

Inspection findings

- The school development plan is well structured and contains appropriate priorities, including the effective use of pupil premium funding to raise standards in mathematics and the improvement of pupils' attendance.

- Governors have good professional skills and insight, which they use effectively to monitor the work of the school. They ask probing questions to challenge you about the impact of initiatives. Governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, based on good-quality information in your reports to them and their rigorous checking that the actions in the school development plan are having the impact they desired. 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 good-quality support and guidance from the local authority's adviser linked to your school. They regularly provide external checks on the quality of your own self-evaluation and provide expert advice on driving improvement in the quality of mathematics teaching in school.
- In our discussions about my line of enquiry about the quality of teaching of reading, we explored the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement in phonics. Pupils develop a good understanding of phonics because of the quality of teaching they receive. Phonics teaching is brisk and sharply focused. Teachers make effective use of skilled and dedicated teaching assistants to ensure that pupils receive appropriate levels of challenge that are matched carefully to their ability. The small number of pupils who do not reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check receive appropriate and effective additional support so that they reach the expected standard in phonics by the time they enter key stage 2.
- As part of my line of enquiry about the quality of the teaching of reading and mathematics, I identified that reading is taught systematically and effectively across the school. Pupils develop their fluency in reading quickly and are confident to tackle unfamiliar words because of the teaching they receive. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and use questioning well to develop reading comprehension skills effectively both in dedicated English lessons and in other subjects. Dedicated volunteers receive appropriate induction and have a positive impact on helping pupils improve their reading skills, using frequent individual reading sessions. Pupils leave the school with high standards in reading, well above those of other pupils nationally.
- Your actions to enhance the quality of teaching of mathematics are having a positive impact and standards are rising. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and good subject knowledge. Work in books shows that pupils receive more opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge to solve theoretical and practical problems. For example, in key stage 2, pupils wrestled with the mathematical problems associated with costing the designs of new outfits for 'Oompa Loompas', before then applying their calculations practically to make them as part of a design and technology project. Pupils say that mathematics is fun and that they enjoy the challenges it presents. However, the proportions of pupils attaining greater depth are lower than those for reading and writing in

school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance rates of pupils rise, particularly for those who are disadvantaged
- the progress pupils make in mathematics accelerates further so that larger proportions attain at a greater depth.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool 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, members of staff and governors, including the chair of the governing body. A meeting was held with the adviser from the local authority who works with the school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school. Attention was given to the information contained within responses to the online questionnaires for parents.

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