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Mr Vincent Murray
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Murray

Short inspection of St Wulstan's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. A thirst for learning is apparent among pupils at St Wulstan's who evidently 'believe to achieve'. You continually strive to identify and remove barriers to pupils' learning. Staff encourage pupils to be thoughtful and kind citizens who make a valuable contribution to their community within and beyond school, including through their membership of the choir and their work to maintain civic pride in Great Harwood. High morale among staff characterises St Wulstan's. One member of staff commented that, 'We have a fantastic management team, supportive governors and wonderful, responsive well-behaved children.' The vast majority of parents are fully committed to the ethos and values of the school.

The results achieved by Year 6 girls and disadvantaged pupils in the 2016 assessment tests were untypically low for the school, especially in reading. You have taken resolute action to improve the teaching of reading and to ensure that pupils are better prepared for the rigours of the assessment regime. The progress being made by all groups of pupils currently in school has strengthened. You have reorganised programmes of support to better meet the needs of pupils and early indications are that these are having a positive impact. You are monitoring individual pupils' progress carefully but are not yet in a position to evaluate whether the programmes you use provide good value for money.

You have taken various steps to improve the challenge provided for the most able pupils, including through revising the school's approach to teaching mathematics. I

observed pupils explaining confidently how they investigated mathematical problems that are written in words. They relish the additional challenges that teachers provide. They also tackle classic literature with zeal. Much of the teaching I observed was energised by teachers' high expectations; a can-do culture is evident at St Wulstan's. We agreed that, on occasions, tasks could be refined further to support pupils' intended learning. There is room for more sharing of effective practice within the school so as to raise further the quality of teaching.

At your last inspection, an area for improvement was to provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length in different subjects. You have acted upon this with rigour through training for staff and raising expectations of pupils' stamina for sustained writing. There are many examples of pupils' writing displayed around school as well as in their books. Pupils achieved significantly better than pupils nationally in writing in 2016 and all groups made strong progress in this subject. Their outcomes in the spelling, punctuation and grammar test were not as strong and you are considering ways of improving the recording of this work so that pupils can strengthen their writing still further.

Inspectors also asked the school to improve the tracking of children's progress in the early years. This has been done. The Reception Year teacher has a very good understanding of children's skills and adapts work well to meet their needs and interests.

Pupils' attendance is above average. However, in 2016, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was low. Your family liaison officer is working closely with pupils and their families to ensure that attendance issues are resolved. The impact of this work is clearly evident in the improved attendance of individual pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team, governors and staff take safeguarding seriously and regard it as being everyone's responsibility. Thorough checks are undertaken to confirm the suitability of all staff and governors when they are appointed. All of them have received appropriate, up-to-date training. There are clear processes for reporting any concerns and the school works effectively with external agencies to keep children safe. The school site is secure and the governors have taken action to ensure that pupils are safe when they are online. Pupils with whom I spoke said that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. The school's published anti-bullying policy is quite brief and we agreed that revision would be helpful to make quite clear what steps should be taken to identify or address different types of bullying.

Inspection findings

- A key focus of the inspection was to consider whether the teaching of reading is effective, following a downturn in outcomes in 2016 when girls and disadvantaged pupils made weaker progress than was typical for the school. I observed reading being taught well. Children in Reception Year were eager to share books and excited when they spotted the word 'said', which they recognised from earlier

teaching. Outcomes in phonics are strong; in 2016, the school's performance in the Year 1 phonics check was above the national average. In key stage 1, pupils use their phonic knowledge to break down words, while in key stage 2 pupils are keen to work out the meanings of unfamiliar words from their contexts. Pupils enjoy exploring language, as typified by a pupil who remarked, 'Really a thesaurus is a book of synonyms, whereas a dictionary helps more with spelling.' Many pupils read voraciously and their reading records indicate that they change their books regularly and are given good support with reading by adults at school and at home. Pupils in upper key stage 2 enjoy studying classic literature and do not shy away from complex ideas, such as when considering a science fiction text to complement scientific enquiry about the planets. The school's tracking shows that strong progress is now being made in reading, and the school is assessing pupils' progress carefully. The approach to support, through booster classes and specific programmes, has been reconfigured so that pupils' needs are met more closely.

- The most able pupils are required to complete work that stretches them, both in school and for homework. More pupils are on track to achieve at above age-related expectations in 2017, including disadvantaged pupils. The school's revised approach to teaching mathematics has been particularly welcomed by pupils who enjoy the 'tough challenges' they now receive, and the opportunities provided to explain their mathematical thinking.
- The school has been conspicuously successful in improving standards in pupils' writing and fostering their keenness to write. Year 6 pupils enjoyed writing diary extracts through which they showed empathy with characters from 'Jane Eyre'. Pupils include grammatical constructions, such as adverbial clauses, quite confidently in their writing. Their achievement in spelling, punctuation and grammar is not as strong as their composition though, and the school is considering how to rationalise exercise books so that pupils' learning of these skills can be applied more readily to their written work.
- Children make good progress in the early years and their achievements are closely tracked. The Reception teacher is adept at recognising children's interests and using them to stimulate learning. I observed children devising army drills and having interesting conversations during their role play in the doctor's surgery, building on their learning about people who help the community.
- School leaders monitor teaching regularly. They have benefited from the guidance provided by local authority advisers. Leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate. There is some highly effective practice in school that can be built on to raise standards further. One teacher is a member of a local authority cluster designed to identify and share effective practice with other schools, particularly about preparing pupils for more challenging assessment in Year 6. A benefit of the school's federation is that practice is discussed and teachers check their assessments of pupils' work with colleagues in other schools.
- The attendance of disadvantaged pupils was low in 2016 due to some specific factors, including illness. The school employs a family liaison worker, shared with other local schools, who provides significant support to pupils and their families and whose work has led to improved attendance for a number of pupils. Overall, attendance is currently above the national figure.

- The leadership of the federation has been streamlined. Roles and accountabilities are clear and governance is strong. Leaders are clear about what needs to be done to take the school to its next stage. The school improvement plan priorities have emerged from accurate self-evaluation and there is a strong, shared will to take the school from strength to strength.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- proceed with their plans to ensure that pupils' written work is recorded in such a way that their progress to be more readily tracked and errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar can be addressed
- share the most effective teaching in the school so that it leads to consistently strong learning
- evaluate the impact on pupils' outcomes of specific programmes of support so that there is a clear understanding of which are working well
- revise the anti-bullying policy so that it gives clearer advice on different forms of bullying and how bullying should be reported and addressed.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner, the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I made brief visits to all classes during which I focused specifically on the teaching of reading and considered pupils' reading records. I listened to some pupils reading and talked to them about how they understood what they had read.
- I looked through a range of pupils' work in exercise books and on wall displays.
- I met with the headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics, seven governors and two representatives of the local authority.
- I spoke informally with pupils during the day and took into account the responses made to Ofsted's survey of pupils' views. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times.
- I talked with 11 parents and grandparents when they brought their children to school and read responses from seven parents to Ofsted's Parent View survey.

- I considered the responses made by 13 staff to Ofsted's survey.
- I considered a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and the performance information for pupils currently in school.
- I also reviewed safeguarding documentation and a range of policies on the school's website.