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Mrs A Thomson  
Headteacher  
St Mary's and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn  
Bennington Street  
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Dear Mrs Thomson

### **Short inspection of St Mary's and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn**

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 May 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You know the strengths of the school exceptionally well and quickly tackle emerging weaknesses as soon as they are identified. All staff live up to the school's mission statement, 'being different, belonging together, in the family of God', by making sure no pupil is at a disadvantage because of their language difficulties, because they are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils confirmed this view as they told me how 'fantastic' it was being a part of this school family. They would recommend the school to anyone and said it, 'hits every point a child needs', and, 'I wouldn't be the person I am now if it wasn't for this school'. Parents too spoke highly of the school. Many greatly appreciate the help they receive to support their children's learning, but also the excellent support available to help them to improve their own communication and basic skills.

You have completely transformed the outside learning spaces. Learning for children in the early years, a line of enquiry in this inspection, has been greatly enhanced because children have a wide range of activities to enable them to learn as they play together using water, sand and mud and to use creativity in construction. Other outside areas provide safe surfaces for team and ball games, and activity tables present other engaging and interesting activities for playtimes.

You have successfully tackled all the improvements needed at the time of the previous inspection. You have improved the quality of writing across the school and in 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard by the end of Year 6 was above the national average. You have done this by improving pupils' speaking and listening skills, encouraging them to talk about and to share their ideas before committing them to paper. During my visit, interested and excited pupils enthusiastically shared their ideas with a visiting 'story teller' before returning to their class to write these down. Topic-based experiences and links with art, music and drama, also provide a helpful stimulus for writing.

You have tackled inconsistencies in teaching by encouraging staff to share good practice. Teachers told me about the opportunities available to observe each other's teaching and how colleagues are always willing to offer support when faced with new challenges. Your monitoring of teaching provides an effective additional layer of support and challenge through the detailed and helpful feedback you give to teachers, following observations of teaching, short visits to lessons and checks on pupils' work in books.

One of the key lines of enquiry for this inspection was to find out more about the effectiveness of teaching and learning for the most able, especially in reading and mathematics. I also wanted to look more closely at the additional support you provide for pupils to remove their barriers to learning; and to find out more about the reasons why attendance was low in 2016.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality because you have recently checked this through an external review. You have successfully created a culture in which all staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe. Checks made before staff are appointed are carried out with equal rigour for teaching and non-teaching staff. Accurate records are maintained to record staff attendance at safeguarding training; and staff sign to say they have read and understand safeguarding updates, guidance and policies. Staff know the correct procedures to follow if they have concerns about a pupil and understand the need for urgency in making a referral.

You make sure pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. This was confirmed by pupils who shared what they know about keeping safe when using the internet, for example. Pupils confidently stated there are no bullies in their school. They say there are a few 'fall-outs' in friendships but explained how, when this happens, teachers encourage pupils to talk about their difficulties and help pupils to become friends again.

### **Inspection findings**

- You have given a high priority to the early identification of pupils who have particular talents, such as in art, physical education, music or drama, as well as those who have strengths in literacy and numeracy. From your observations of

teaching and learning you have identified weaknesses in these pupils' thinking skills and in the way they find out more information for themselves by asking questions. A programme of staff training is planned to tackle these weaknesses.

- The most able pupils in mathematics receive further challenge through additional problem-solving activities to encourage them to think harder about their mathematics. Pupils enjoy these sessions which are taught by the chair of the governing body, as well as their usual teacher.
- Pupils use a phonics strategy well to work out how to read unfamiliar words. Some pupils, including the most able, read words successfully but they do not always understand the meaning and, therefore, sentences do not make sense to them. Not all pupils have the opportunity to read to an adult and, therefore, these misconceptions go unchecked.
- You track each pupil's achievement carefully to make sure they are given work at the right level of difficulty; however, this is not always the case in reading. Some pupils, including the most able, have reading books which are too easy for them and which do not allow them to extend their vocabulary or find out about new words.
- Teachers regularly assess pupils' attainment and progress in writing and mathematics to compare their achievement with age-related expectations. Formal tests are carried out each term and progress in writing is evident from your strategy of retaining final pieces of writing as a termly 'progress marker'.
- Teaching assistants work very effectively with pupils to remove any barriers to learning that pupils may have. Pupils are known equally well by teaching assistants and teachers. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers in planning work for pupils and adapting resources to help them to succeed. Bilingual teaching assistants help those at the early stages of learning English and speaking awards are an incentive for all pupils to improve their skills.
- Despite your introduction of a wide range of strategies to tackle poor attendance, including rewards and sanctions, overall attendance shows little sign of improvement and is likely to continue to be below average. The school is small and, therefore, the low attendance and frequent absence of a few pupils has a negative impact on overall attendance. Rightly, you have not authorised extended holidays, and the issuing of local authority warning notices and prosecutions is failing to make any difference in persuading parents to send their children to school more regularly.
- Governors continue to be effective in their work. They provide a good balance of challenge and support to you and other leaders because they are knowledgeable, skilled and experienced. Governors know the school's website is not as useful a tool as it might be for parents, as it is not easy to find information needed. Following your review of the school website, improvements are planned.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils have suitably challenging books to read and, where they do not have the opportunity to be heard read by a parent, they can read aloud to an adult in school who checks their comprehension and understanding of key vocabulary
- they continue with their valuable work to tackle the low attendance of a small number of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, a range of activities were carried out. For example, I checked your safeguarding documentation, analysed attendance records and met with you, other leaders, staff and a group of governors. I spoke with your school improvement partner in a telephone conversation. I scrutinised your own analysis from your recent parents' survey and met with three parents during the day to gather their views, because there were insufficient responses to Ofsted's Parent View. I talked with pupils during the day, listened to them read and saw them at work when you joined me in visits to lessons. I also looked at a sample of pupils' books to find out about the progress they were making in writing.