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Mrs Angela Aspinwall-Livesey  
Headteacher  
St John's Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale  
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Dear Mrs Aspinwall-Livesey

### **Short inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale**

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 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 your 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. Your leadership of the school is highly effective. You and your staff are strongly committed to ensuring the very best outcomes for all pupils who attend your school. Under your leadership the school provides a nurturing, caring and family-oriented environment for all pupils and their families. Consequently, pupils grow into confident, ambitious youngsters who are well prepared for the next stage of their education and what life has to hold.

From their different starting points, children in early years make good progress, and some progress is outstanding. The teaching of phonics is a real strength of the school, as is the progress which pupils make in writing and mathematics at key stage 2. Over time, it is excellent. From analysing the most recent published data, we both recognise that the number of pupils reaching the higher standards at key stage 1 could be higher in reading, writing and mathematics. This is particularly the case for middle-ability disadvantaged pupils. Although, over time, the progress in reading at key stage 2 is strong, it is not as rapid as the progress that pupils make in writing and mathematics. Progress in both of these subjects was significantly above the national average in 2016, although not in the top 10% nationally. You also acknowledge that at the time of the inspection the school website was not compliant.

You ensure that swift action is taken to deal with any underperformance. For instance, to improve outcomes in reading you have implemented a number of

innovative measures which are beginning to have a positive impact. Examples are: pupils now come into school earlier and are provided with structured reading activities which meet their individual needs. Additional resources have been purchased to enhance class libraries and at least five books are given to pupils during the year to encourage the development of their own 'personal' library.

Your staff team hold you in the highest regard. They are obviously very proud to work at your school and morale is high. With your encouragement, staff actively develop their roles in education. The support that you and senior leaders give to the group of teachers in your school who are new to the profession is second to none. Staff typically commented: 'The professional development and support that I had as a newly qualified teacher was fantastic. This inspired me to push myself further in my career.' A staff library has been established with resources to support teachers' professional development. Your staff talked eloquently to me about the high levels of support given to families facing difficult situations and about the home visits that each new family to the school receives. As a result, you and your staff have a very good understanding of your families' needs and the challenges that they may face.

One of the things that impressed me most about your school was the quality of the learning environment, both indoors and outside. Quite simply, it is breathtaking. An artist works with pupils and the quality of the displays is exemplary, magically bringing the curriculum to life.

Pupils display a keen thirst for knowledge. Standards of behaviour that I observed at the time of the inspection were impeccable. Relationships at all levels are respectful. Pupils told me that they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Typical comments include: 'I feel excited and ready to learn.' Many pupils have high aspirations and talked avidly about their desire to go on to further education to become nurses, teachers and artists.

Pupils relish the time they spend learning outdoors, making dens and toasting marshmallows over an open fire. They enjoy the varied range of out-of-school activities, such as gardening and art clubs, which your staff give generously of their time to run. Pupils talk with pride about how they contribute to decision-making within the school, for example as members of the curriculum council.

Pupils' views are also represented on interview panels when new staff are being appointed. Pupils also benefit greatly from the opportunities you give them to learn to play a musical instrument and play in a brass band.

Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and are encouraged to take an active part in their learning. For example, they are invited to attend open events every half term, where they have opportunities to work with their children and look at exemplars of their work. Although only a small number of parents responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, they typically commented that 'children love this school and are thriving'.

You have the full support of your governing body and local authority representative.

Governors know the school well and the progress that different groups of pupils are making. They offer you support and challenge in equal measure.

You have addressed the areas for improvement raised at the last inspection. For example, teachers now plan activities with a clear learning intention in mind. There is a strong emphasis on developing children's communication and language skills in Reception. A speech and language therapist is now employed to work with children who are experiencing difficulties in language acquisition. Pupils are taking a greater pride in their work, and key skills, such as the correct use of punctuation, are reinforced.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

At the start of this inspection, there was no information readily available to show that all governors has completed the suitability checks required by law. Not all governors had their Disclosing and Barring Service (DBS) checks recorded in the single central record. This was deemed to be an administrative error by Ofsted and was rectified by the end of the inspection. All other documentation relating to safeguarding is of the required standard and fit for purpose.

Staff whom I talked to during inspection were knowledgeable about all safeguarding procedures, including the latest national concerns of radicalisation, female genital mutilation and sexual exploitation. Staff have read part one of 'Keeping children safe in education'. Leaders in the school who have responsibility for safeguarding have completed training at the appropriate level. There are comprehensive procedures in place for the recruitment and selection of staff. The school site is secure and visitors' credentials are closely checked.

A filtering system is in place to keep pupils safe when they are online. E-safety is well promoted. Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying. Pupils emphatically told me that bullying is rare and inspection evidence confirms that this is the case. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and the dangers of alcohol and drug misuse through the curriculum and visitors, such as from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).

### **Inspection findings**

- You keep a very close eye on the quality of teaching and performance management procedures are rigorous. Teachers are given very detailed feedback on the quality of their teaching as a result of your observations. There is a strong commitment to ongoing training to keep teachers' skills fresh and up to date. Teachers also have opportunities to observe best practice within the school. You and your staff also work closely with other schools in the locality to support and challenge each other.
- As we toured the school, I observed pupils who were happy and confident. In early years, children happily recited nursery rhymes or read on their own for pleasure. Children worked well together and displayed good levels of cooperation as they built models. Staff actively promote the use of mathematical language as

they interact with children. Marking materials are ready available in the environment to develop children's writing skills.

- Moving through key stage 1, we observed pupils in Year 1 enjoying the challenge of finding a fraction of a given amount. Finally, in Year 2, pupils were engrossed in identifying adverbs and constructing sentences.
- Although there is evidence of strong gains in pupils learning, mathematics books show that, at times, activities planned by teachers do not always challenge pupils enough, particularly the most able. In addition, when looking at pupils' writing I noticed that, on occasions, tasks are structured in a way that prevents pupils writing at length or in greater depth.
- I listened to pupils read from Year 2 and 6. Most read with flair and expression. Younger pupils are able to talk about the plot and their comprehension skills are good. Older pupils talked in depth about the type of books that they liked to read and their favourite authors. However, for some pupils, the books they were reading were too easy. In addition, some commented that they would like more advice from teachers about what they need to do to become better readers.
- Your school has adopted an innovative whole-school approach to managing behaviour. The restorative justice approach allows pupils involved in behavioural incidents to meet, discuss what has happened, resolve issues and move things forward. The positive impact of this is that pupils are becoming confident in resolving their own behavioural issues.
- You and your staff have crafted a rich and balanced curriculum which ignites pupils' passion for learning. Subjects are taught discretely or through topics which are securely linked to pupils' interests. The curriculum is further enriched by a wonderful range of trips, which further broadens pupils' experiences. The progress that pupils make in subjects such as history and geography is closely monitored by subject leaders.
- Good attendance is well promoted. You and your staff give effective levels of support to those for whom attendance is an issue. Parents are made aware of how poor attendance impacts on pupils' progress and attainment. Any unexplained absences are followed up in a timely manner. Attendance and persistent absenteeism, which were issues for disadvantaged pupils highlighted in the published data, have been addressed. Attendance is now broadly in line with the national average and persistent absenteeism has reduced.
- The website contains a wealth of information for parents, is well organised, bright and is easy to navigate. However, at the time of the inspection it was not compliant. The information on the website relating to the impact of the sports premium fund spending lacked the required detail.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater number of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, reach the higher standards at the end of key stage 1 this academic year, in reading, writing and mathematics, and that this is sustained over time

- pupils at key stage 2 make even better progress in reading so that it reflects more closely their progress in writing and mathematics
- the website is compliant with regard to the information that must be published in relation to the impact of the sports premium funding.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the governing body. I also had informal discussions with staff and pupils to seek their views of the school. I went on a tour of the school accompanied by you to see the learning that was taking place. I looked at examples of pupils' work and observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as pupils moved around the school. I listened to pupils read. I reviewed a range of documentation including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. I also took account of the three responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire completed by parents.