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Mrs Elizabeth Devey  
St John's Catholic Primary School, Burscough  
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Dear Mrs Devey

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

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 the school was judged to be good in December 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 and your leadership team have created a school where pupils feel safe, happy and eager to learn. You aim to ensure that everyone in St John's Catholic Primary School is highly valued and the needs of individual pupils are at the heart of this inclusive school. This is reflected in the school's strong Christian ethos. Governors work closely with you to provide effective leadership.

Most parents are very complimentary about the school and appreciate the hard work and dedication of the staff. Typically, parents 'feel extremely positive about the school and teachers'. They say that 'children are very happy there in so many ways'. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire would recommend the school to others.

Since the last inspection, you have made excellent use of the extensive outdoor space which the school enjoys. The forest school experiences have helped pupils gain a better understanding of the natural world and an appreciation of their heritage. They have unique opportunities, such as working with wildlife experts to conduct bird ringing to help identify birds. These opportunities help to raise pupils' self-esteem, improve their behaviour and increase their motivation. You have noticed that this has had a very positive impact on developing good attitudes for many pupils. This in turn has supported pupils with their learning, building resilience and perseverance. You and the staff are rightly proud of the school's recent success in being only the second school in the country to achieve the Gold Mark status for

'Learning Outside the Classroom' (LOtC) as a result of this work.

At the last inspection in 2012, you were asked to increase the amount of outstanding teaching by providing pupils with more opportunities to apply their good basic skills to solve mathematical investigations. You have successfully ensured that the teaching of mathematics in school is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. An able subject leader is having a positive influence on improvements and supports staff to improve their teaching. Teachers told me about opportunities available to support and observe each other teaching. You have created a strong team spirit where colleagues are always willing to offer support. The monitoring of teaching and learning provides teachers with additional support and challenge. Detailed and helpful feedback is given to teachers following observations or checks on pupils' work in books.

You were also asked to help pupils deepen their understanding of cultures and people who are different to themselves. You are aware that this work has only partially been completed. The school has been very successful in helping pupils to understand right and wrong and to investigate moral and ethical issues. There is a strong spiritual culture in the school that helps pupils develop empathy, respect and understanding of others. They participate widely in the community and learn about how to make a positive contribution to society. However, they do not have enough opportunities to learn about cultural and religious differences of life in modern Britain and beyond.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The systems in place to keep pupils safe are robust. Leaders and governors fulfil the statutory requirements when appointing new staff. Governors are mindful of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding and publish school policies on the website that are compliant with government guidance. Staff training is up to date and comprehensive.

School staff maintain close communication with families to support those pupils who need to improve their punctuality and attendance, and they work effectively with outside agencies when further help is needed.

The caring relationships that have been established between staff and pupils mean that pupils feel safe. Pupils have confidence that adults in school will help them if they have a problem and they know it will be dealt with quickly.

### **Inspection findings**

- In this inspection, I focused my time on four different aspects. First, I investigated whether the standards of reading in school were improving, especially for pupils in the early years and key stage 1. The school's own analysis shows that the dip in the attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 was not typical of the achievement of pupils across the school. You told me that several new pupils joined the school last year. You know that in a small school

like St John's Catholic Primary School even one pupil can make a big difference to the results. This means that the published data has to be treated with caution and does not always provide an accurate picture of overall outcomes.

Nevertheless, you do not use this as an excuse and take action to tackle any concerns. Specific reading programmes have been implemented across the school that are having a positive impact on progress. When listening to pupils read, it is clear that they are learning skills to help them make rapid progress. They read frequently and are fluent and confident readers. Pupils appreciate the new library facilities and the wide range of books the school offers for their enjoyment. The school's own assessments and monitoring show that a high proportion of pupils are on track to achieve the standards expected of them in reading in Year 2.

- In the early years, children have many opportunities to enjoy reading for pleasure as well as learning their letters and sounds. Indoor and outdoor activities are planned to encourage them to take an interest in reading about the focus of their learning. For example, while using toothbrushes and toothpaste, children are given a useful leaflet of instructions to read in order to learn how to brush their teeth properly. By the end of Reception, children make good progress in their reading and are well prepared for Year 1. Children enjoy the new library facilities and wide range of books and are inspired to read more frequently. Throughout the school, pupils are encouraged to read regularly and show positive attitudes to reading.
- The second focus was to see whether the most able pupils are being challenged enough in their mathematics. The school's own analysis shows that the progress these pupils make is improving. The work in pupils' mathematics books shows good progress across each year group. Increasingly, pupils, including the most able, are beginning to use new strategies that strengthen their ability to apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and develop their reasoning skills. As a result, more pupils are reaching higher levels of attainment in mathematics and the most able pupils make rapid progress.
- A further area of focus was concerned with whether pupils' progress in writing in key stage 2, especially for girls, was good enough. The subject leader for English has introduced a systematic approach to the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling. This is having a positive impact on teaching and is improving writing across the school, including that of girls. In addition, pupils are given plenty of opportunities to write at length, developing their understanding of text structure and plot development. Pupils discussed their approaches with enthusiasm and believe their writing is getting better. School assessments, tracking data and discussions with leaders show that attainment and progress are monitored closely and support is swiftly implemented when needed. The school monitors the achievement of pupils both individually and as a group and, from evidence in pupils' books, progress is good.
- When teaching assistants work closely with teachers, they offer effective support to help remove barriers to learning for pupils. Occasionally, however, they are not supervised closely enough, so that teachers do not know whether the quality of the teaching is helping pupils to succeed.

- The fourth aspect I considered was whether the curriculum provides enough opportunities for all groups of pupils to make the progress they should in a wide range of subjects. You have shaped the curriculum to use the outdoor environment fully and bring learning to life for pupils. Interesting topics are carefully planned to excite and enthuse them. Science, geography, history and art are explored through the outdoor environment. You have identified that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make especially good progress using this approach to learning.
- Finally, I looked in detail at the information published on the school's website. There is some useful information available. However, some improvements are needed to ensure that all of the required details are included so that parents and others have easy access to the information they may need. This includes providing more information about how the curriculum is taught in school and the content to be delivered. Also, the school's published plans for the use of the pupil premium and the primary physical education (PE) and sport premium funding do not give enough detail to show the impact of the school's work.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching assistants are deployed appropriately and their skills and expertise are developed to provide effective support when working with groups of pupils
- there are more opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to learn about the contribution made both by men and by women of different races, ethnic groups and religious beliefs to the country they live in today
- the website includes all of the required details so that parents and others have easy access to the information they may need.

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

Catherine Parkinson  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I carried out observations of learning in all year groups. Four of these were joint observations with the headteacher. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, minutes of meetings of the governing body, behaviour logs and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions with members of staff, governors and the local authority representative. I listened to pupils read and analysed pupils' work. I also looked at the work of children in the early years. I evaluated 21 responses received through Parent View (Ofsted's online survey), 30 responses to the online pupil survey and six responses received through the online staff survey.