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Mrs Mia Barlow
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Dear Mrs Barlow

Short inspection of St Bernard's Catholic Primary School, Preston

Following my visit to the school on 11 May 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 September 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 have developed a strong ethos where the school's Catholic values are at the heart of everyone's work. You, your staff and governors are ambitious for pupils and have established an inclusive community where people are highly valued.

At the previous inspection, the inspectors asked you to provide more opportunities for parents to help their children improve their skills in both reading and writing. You have done this well. You actively involve parents in their children's learning by providing reading sessions for them to read with their children. Also, staff have led reading and writing information sessions for parents. The use of the school app to let parents know what their children will be learning each week has led to greater parental involvement in their children's learning.

You were also asked to provide greater challenge for the most able pupils in key stage 2, especially in English. In response to this, you have raised expectations for the most able pupils and you hold focused meetings to discuss their progress. Leaders have helped staff to improve their questioning skills. In some classes, the most able pupils have the opportunity to discuss and analyse the structure of complex writing. This helps them to ensure that their own writing is clear and well organised. However, there is still some work to do to ensure that the most able are consistently challenged to achieve greater depth in their learning.

Pupils are proud of their school and feel valued and well supported. As one pupil commented: 'Teachers are kind and helpful. Lessons are challenging and fun.' Pupils behave well in lessons, at breaktimes and around the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive.

The very large majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey are proud to work in the school and have trust and confidence in leaders. Staff appreciate the training that they receive to improve their classroom practice.

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, appreciate that you are approachable and that you know the pupils well. Parents are happy with the school. One parent commented, 'My children are supported very well. There is a great family atmosphere.' Many of the parents praised the school in their written comments, for example, 'It's an amazing school, where everyone is welcomed and valued.'

You have developed a strong team of middle leaders. They carefully track the progress of pupils and ensure that pupils who do not make sufficient progress are supported well. Middle leaders have a clear grasp of what the school needs to do to improve and they are taking an active role in bringing about the key improvements.

Governors are very committed to the school and have a wide range of skills and expertise. They undertake training and visit the school regularly to ensure that they have a good understanding of what is working well and what could be improved further. Governors challenge leaders well on the actions that they are taking to bring about further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. You have created a culture in which safeguarding is seen as highly important. Recruitment procedures follow the latest statutory guidance.

All staff have completed training in safeguarding. They receive frequent updates and have read the most recent government guidelines. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil. Governors have close oversight of safeguarding practices and challenge leaders effectively on safeguarding issues.

Pupils say that they feel safe and well looked after in school. They report that bullying is rare and that staff act quickly to resolve any issues. Pupils know whom they can talk to for help, support and guidance.

Inspection findings

- A key line of enquiry for this inspection related to the progress that pupils make in writing in key stages 1 and 2. You and your team have evaluated the performance of the 2016 cohort carefully. You realised that weaknesses in pupils'

spelling, grammar and their use of vocabulary held pupils back last year. You have tackled this identified weakness well. You have introduced a range of appropriate and effective strategies to improve pupils' progress. For example, you have improved ongoing training for staff and strengthened the moderation of pupils' work. You have also enhanced and developed the range of interventions to support pupils who may have fallen behind.

- Added to this, you and your team have provided more 'boy-friendly' texts to engage boys in their learning. Teachers are providing pupils with more opportunities for extended writing. There is a strong focus from teachers on ensuring that pupils are accurate in their spelling and punctuation. Your analysis has identified that pupils are making good progress in writing. My review of pupils' books confirms this is true. However, some of the most able pupils are not working at greater depth. This is because they are not sufficiently challenged.
- A further line of enquiry related to the progress of disadvantaged pupils in reading and writing at key stage 2. You had already identified that these pupils did not make rapid enough progress last year. My review of your data, my scrutiny of pupils' work and my discussions with pupils indicate that disadvantaged pupils now make the same progress as others nationally. The pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide extra teaching sessions to help these pupils catch up.
- Across the school, you have introduced more-challenging texts which require pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, to apply their comprehension skills. For example, during the inspection, Year 6 pupils were captivated by the class study of the book 'The boy in the striped pyjamas'. Pupils discussed what the author was trying to convey and articulated their opinions well. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 read well. They enjoy reading and are able to decode and pronounce unfamiliar words. Pupils say that they have access to a greater range of books, which captures their interest. You encourage reading by giving out awards and celebrating World Book Day.
- My final line of enquiry was related to attendance. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is shown by their above-average attendance. You have put in place more robust systems to monitor and follow up pupil absence. The impact of this is that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has risen. Attendance rates for both of these groups are now above the national average, with a reduction in those who are regularly absent from school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a continued focus on sustaining improvement to pupils' achievement in writing
- they provide greater challenge for the most able pupils to reach the highest standards of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I had meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders and five governors. I met with eight pupils from key stage 2 and spoke to others during breaktimes. I visited all classes with you, where I observed teaching and learning, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils. I also observed reading in the nurture room and heard pupils read from Year 2 and Year 6. We carried out a detailed work scrutiny of pupils' writing across the school. I spoke with parents as they dropped their children off at school. I took account of 32 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including 32 free-text responses. I also considered the views of 32 staff and 40 pupils through Ofsted's online questionnaires. I looked at information about pupils' progress and at your self-evaluation and action planning. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe, records of training, safeguarding checks and attendance information.