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Mrs Clare Doodson  
Headteacher  
St Bernard's RC Primary School  
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Bolton  
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Dear Mrs Doodson

### **Short inspection of St Bernard's RC Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 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 and further developed the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your self-evaluation is accurate and reflects your robust analysis of school assessments, comparing appropriately with national expectations. Consequently, your school improvement plan focuses on those areas which will best improve standards of education for your pupils. You, along with your senior leadership team and governors, aim to 'live' the school's mission statement: 'a unique family in faith, love and learning'. This was very apparent from discussions with parents, who are confident that any issues raised with leaders will be dealt with swiftly. Older pupils supported and encouraged younger pupils during the healthy-lifestyles activities on the day of the inspection, showing their excellent caring attitudes.

Parents speak very highly of the school and its staff. They value the fact that 'the headteacher knows everyone by name – children and families'. They appreciate the vast range of extra-curricular activities and special themed days that you plan and provide for pupils. Parents talk positively about the transition into school and on to high school, especially the extra support provided for individual pupils. Parents describe the school as 'excellent' and 'amazing'. Pupils are equally positive about their school. Older pupils state that they 'definitely feel prepared for the move to high school'. They have a very good understanding of how teachers help them to learn, and speak fondly of the positive relationships across and within the school. Pupils know that any new pupils 'will be well looked after and will soon have lots of friends because everyone is really nice to each other'.

You have given a high priority to improving the quality of pupils' spelling and handwriting because this was an area for improvement at the last inspection. Pupils' books demonstrate how you have improved the quality of pupils' writing in all year groups, due to improved teaching and higher expectations. However, although pupils' books show higher standards of spelling, their application of phonics and spelling has not improved as rapidly as the content and imagery of their writing.

Pupils talk very clearly about the improvements you have introduced to the feedback that teachers give them on their work. Pupils value the time that teachers spend with them to explain and clarify their misunderstandings. Pupils recognise that this feedback helps them to achieve even higher standards.

Pupils write, and use mathematics, well across the curriculum. Their books show a range of detailed writing to explain historical or geographical research. In science and geography, pupils use tables and charts to represent their findings. However, these lack the quality of similar work seen in pupils' mathematics books.

Attendance overall, and for groups of pupils, is currently in line with, or better than, the national average. This is because you have implemented very good procedures to tackle absenteeism. There are usually personal, family or health reasons for the lower attendance of some pupils. Staff are fully aware of the support they are able to offer these pupils to reduce absences.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have created a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Leaders and governors fulfil statutory requirements when appointing new members of staff.

Parents and pupils say that the school is a safe place to be. You and your governors make certain that staff receive high-quality training. As a result, staff know how to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse. Staff are very clear about the procedures for reporting and recording any concerns they have regarding the safeguarding of pupils. Leaders are tenacious in their work to protect vulnerable pupils. Your staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe. Leaders have introduced and implemented clear programmes to teach pupils about personal and internet safety. Pupils understand the dangers associated with internet use and report concerns to staff.

### **Inspection findings**

- Children join school in Reception with attainment slightly below the expectations for their age. Children make good progress as a result of the strong teaching and support they receive, especially in speech and language acquisition. Your most-able pupils make particularly good progress in the Reception class. You have made sure that this strong teaching continues across key stage 1, so that attainment is above the national average by the end of Year 2. In key stage 2, pupils make good progress in reading and mathematics and progress in writing is

broadly similar to the national average. However, you are aware that the progress of middle-ability boys in writing was well below the national average in 2016.

- My first line of enquiry therefore concerned finding out what you have done to improve boys' writing. Strong teaching in the early years is enabling children to make good progress in their writing from their starting points. Children are able to apply what they have learned in their writing to other subjects, as a result of good support from teachers. This strong teaching ensures that pupils in key stage 1 continue to make rapid progress.
- You have successfully improved the quality of pupils' writing by improving the quality of teaching and making sure that teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers ensure that, in line with the school's marking policy, pupils have enough time to make improvements to their work following the feedback given by their teachers and peers. You have also given a greater focus to independent editing and drafting of writing and the application of grammar. As a result of your work, all of these strategies have combined to enable pupils to produce writing which contains more detail and creates the appropriate atmosphere or tone.
- You are pleased with the improvements made to pupils' writing and provided examples to show how the least able pupils in key stage 2 use paragraphs to structure their writing. Middle-attaining pupils have also improved their skills as they use a variety of sentence structures much more consistently. They also use the features of different types of writing, including letters and arguments. However, it is descriptive writing where you are most proud of the improvements made. Vocabulary and repetition are used well to create imagery and atmosphere. In Year 6, pupils' writing shows good progress over the year. Sentences are better structured and the creative placing of words and phrases has the most effect. 'There was a raucous noise ringing in my ear' is typical of many phrases used in story writing.
- Teachers' assessments show that pupils' attainment is currently better than in 2016 because pupils are making stronger progress. Greater numbers of pupils, particularly boys, are meeting the high expectations that teachers have for their writing. While your work to develop writing has resulted in rapid improvements, spelling and the application of phonics have not improved as quickly. Pupils' application of spelling rules is inconsistent. Some spellings do not reflect rules previously taught.
- My second line of enquiry was to find out more about the progress and attainment of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your recently appointed special educational needs coordinator has a very good understanding of the particular needs of individual pupils. Well-qualified teaching assistants and staff work well with pupils to meet these needs through high-quality teaching activities. Good links have been made with external agencies, such as speech and language therapists, which is helping pupils to improve their communication skills.
- Your strong monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment supports the delivery of tailored teaching based on pupils' identified needs. This is key to the better

outcomes now being seen for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are able to articulate the school's processes and procedures for supporting pupils with clarity, authority and confidence.

- Your nurture group, The Orchard Group, which meets each afternoon, offers a flexible approach to meeting pupils' needs. This provision is well managed and led. Parents value the personalised approach to meeting their children's needs. You inform them about their children's progress and attainment through termly reviews, so they feel fully involved in their children's education.
- Pupils' topic books show the breadth of the curriculum that you provide at St Bernard's. History and geography work is detailed. Science teaching allows older pupils the flexibility to construct their own tests. You have introduced many opportunities for pupils to write and to use their mathematics skills across the curriculum. However, the standard of mathematics work seen in other subjects is below the quality of that seen in pupils' mathematics books.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- spelling and the application of phonics improve at the same rapid rate as the content and structure of pupils' writing
- the high expectations and standards of work seen in mathematics books are transferred and applied consistently to pupils' work across the curriculum.

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 Bolton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.  
Yours sincerely

Ian Shackleton  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team, parents and four members of the governing body. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority. In addition, I talked with small groups of pupils formally in the school and informally outside. As the whole school was involved in a healthy-lifestyles day, which included yoga, art, dance and tennis, I scrutinised the writing, mathematics and topic books of pupils from every year group. I examined, and discussed with you, a range of documents, including those relating to attendance, behaviour, special educational needs and safeguarding. I looked at your self-evaluation, improvement priorities and your assessment information. I also reviewed the school's website. I considered the views expressed by parents through informal meetings and the 34 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as comments received via the free-text facility on Parent View.