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Associate Headteacher  
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Clayton-le-Moors  
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Dear Mrs Sullivan

### **Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Clayton-le-Moors**

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 the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You assumed the associate headteacher role, from January for three days each week, in very sad circumstances. You joined a school in which pupils, staff and parents were grieving the loss of a much-loved headteacher. Since then, you have worked very closely with the deputy headteacher, appointed in the previous year. The deputy headteacher is the acting headteacher for the two days you spend in your own school. This arrangement has worked very well.

First and foremost, you and the deputy headteacher provided support for pupils and staff during a very difficult period. This support continues. Parents are fulsome in their praise for the way you, the deputy headteacher and staff cared for and helped their children deal with the situation. One commented, 'This was done in the most amazing, honest and child-friendly way. Children were helped to look back on the good times and not to hold any emotion in.'

Within this extraordinary context, you and the deputy headteacher ensured that the school continued to thrive. The day-to-day business of learning lost no momentum and together you have implemented some notable improvements. Pupils and parents are highly appreciative of the new library, changes to the early years outdoor provision and the new laptop computers. Parents also commented favourably on improved communication via the school's updated website and the

new use of social media to keep them informed of what their children are learning from day to day. Less noticeable to parents and pupils, but crucially important to the school's effectiveness, are the improvements that have been made to some core systems and processes. These include safeguarding, teachers' assessment of pupils and accountability for their progress, school self-evaluation and development planning. The strength of teamwork between you and the deputy headteacher in making these improvements, and the sensitivity with which they have been implemented, is commendable. The wholly positive response from staff to the online survey is testament to this.

You have been an excellent coach in developing the deputy headteacher's leadership skills during your time as associate headteacher. Your deputy headteacher has been an exceptional role model for teaching and has successfully led improvements to reading and writing since he was appointed. He has welcomed the opportunities that governors have provided for him to lead the school alongside you and has demonstrated his worth.

Pupils thrive and achieve well in this school, including those who are disadvantaged. Pupils work hard, enjoy learning and behave extremely well. They say that they feel safe. Pupils benefit immensely from good teaching and caring and trusting relationships with staff. Pupils know this and act in the same kind and considerate way with each other. This was evident in lessons and in the playground and summed up perfectly by one pupil's comment, 'We are gentle with each other.' Parents recognise the value the school adds to their children's all-round education and are overwhelmingly positive in their praise for the school.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to improve pupils' achievement in writing, including handwriting, and develop a more systematic approach to teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling. Most of these issues have been tackled. The most recent end of key stage 2 statutory assessments of Year 6 pupils' writing showed that pupils' progress was significantly above that of pupils nationally with the same starting points. Pupils' attainment in writing was also significantly above average and boys and girls did equally well. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also achieved well. Improvements in writing are evident across the school. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are now taught consistently well. From a below-average position historically, most Year 6 pupils achieved the expected standard in this area in the 2016 tests, although spelling was not as strong. The school anticipates further improvements in this year's tests. Improvements to handwriting have not been as rapid, particularly in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2. However, improvements are now evident. Early years provision provides children with activities that develop muscle control and coordination, which are needed for good handwriting.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

A key line of enquiry for my visit was to find out how the school keeps pupils safe. The school's child protection policy indicated that staff safeguarding training was out of date. You corrected this administrative error and confirmed that all staff have

received safeguarding training in line with government requirements, including training to protect pupils from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Staff demonstrate a secure understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. They are clear about what to do if they have concerns about a child's safety or if a child shared concerns with them. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Procedures for vetting the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children are rigorous. Safeguarding records are detailed and held securely. You work closely with professional agencies and, where necessary, you persist in ensuring that children receive the support you consider they need to keep them safe. Pupils' attendance is above average and persistent absence is low. In the very rare instances of persistent absence, this is followed up rigorously with a keen eye on ensuring pupils' safety and well-being.

A strong feature of the school's provision to keep pupils safe is the support they are given to cope with and understand issues occurring in the world around them. The school's response to the recent terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena reflected an informed and sensitive approach to the subject of extremism. The impact was very evident when older pupils expressed their feelings in letters they would like extremists to read. One such began, 'If you feel angry, don't hurt people's hearts.'

### **Inspection findings**

- A key line of enquiry for the inspection related to pupils' achievement in reading and writing during key stage 2. This was because the 2016 Year 6 test and assessment results for these subjects were markedly different from those of pupils nationally. Achievement in writing was significantly above average, but achievement in reading was significantly below. Your deputy headteacher, who is also the leader of English, explained the intense focus given to improving writing across the school last year. This included providing specific opportunities for pupils to write in subjects other than English, and to incorporate these into each half-termly topic. As a result, pupils' progress began to accelerate and external verification was sought to confirm the accuracy of the high standards attained by Year 6 pupils in the 2016 assessments. Assessments of current pupils show that the improvements realised last year are being sustained.
- You identified gaps in some pupils' learning when you investigated the reasons for pupils' weaker performance in the 2016 key stage 2 reading tests. Training for teachers and support staff has ensured that the teaching of reading meets the increased demands of the new national curriculum. Teaching focuses on widening pupils' vocabulary, increasing comprehension, improving pupils' stamina in reading independently and, above all, on developing pupils' love of reading. The decisive action has paid off. Pupils who read to me spoke confidently about their reading preferences. They named favourite authors, explained their styles and commented on how they used words and phrases for effect, for example to create suspense. Pupils read expressively and had an informed understanding of the skills that good readers use. In explaining 'inference', for example, pupils said, 'It's like being a detective looking for clues in the words.' and 'It makes you think more about what the author really means.' The school's assessment information shows that achievement in reading has improved.

- The curriculum was another inspection focus. This was because curriculum information on the school's website was out of date and it was unclear how the school ensured that pupils developed a good understanding of equality and diversity. You explained that the school's website had recently been upgraded and the issue regarding out-of-date subject information was an administrative error that was quickly put right. In classrooms and around the school, the displays of pupils' work reflect the breadth of subjects they study and the richness of their learning experiences. Your deputy headteacher demonstrated the meticulous process followed in designing half-termly topics so that there is complete coverage of the skills that pupils must learn in each subject. Pupils are extremely positive about the interesting topics they follow. They identified numerous subjects as favourites and talked excitedly about some of the features that make learning fun and meaningful. Examples included the 'crime-scene investigation' that pupils undertook in science, how learning about different artists inspires pupils' own artwork, the opportunities to learn a musical instrument and interesting visits and events.
- The unique worth of every individual and the expectation that pupils should respect and value diversity is embodied in the school's ethos and culture. In cultivating pupils' understanding of these values, the curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to learn about religions and beliefs different from their own. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of customs and the way of life in different countries and cultures, both past and present, are developed well across the curriculum. In discussions, pupils radiated a sense of fairness and equality. In discussing people's differences one pupil remarked, 'You can't make fun of people because of who they are; everyone is equal.' Pupils' work shows that ideas about diversity and equalities, such as gender stereotyping, are sometimes explored in lessons. However, in teaching pupils what it means to be a citizen in modern Britain, there is scope for you to extend pupils' understanding of diversity and equality, including by enhancing these values better through school displays and resources.
- Stability of leadership, to ensure the school's continued effectiveness, was an inspection focus due to the leadership changes at the start of this year. I have already reported on the strengths of the current leadership team and governors add to this strength, providing challenge and support. An example of governors' strategic leadership is their commitment to ensuring continuity of stable and effective day-to-day leadership and management of the school. From the beginning of the new academic year, the deputy headteacher will become acting headteacher full time, with support from you for two days a week. Governors have secured your agreement to act as mentor once a new substantive headteacher has been appointed and for the first two years in post.
- Early years provision was not identified as a focus for the inspection. However, your expertise with regard to what quality early years provision looks like resulted in you prioritising improvements to this aspect of the school's work. Significant changes have been made so that characteristic features of quality early years provision are met. Children now have greater opportunities to learn through play and exploration, develop thinking skills, creativity and independence, particularly

outdoors. You rightly recognise that the changes need to embed further to ensure that the children get the very best start to their education.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils develop a greater understanding of equalities and of the full range of diversity in modern Britain
- improvements made to the school's early years provision continue to embed.

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 Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margot D'Arcy  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss leaders' evaluations of the school's work and priorities for improvement. We visited a sample of lessons to observe learning and behaviour. I observed pupils' behaviour at break times and as they moved around the school. I met with a group of eight pupils from key stage 2 to discuss their views and experiences of the school and spoke to other pupils informally at break times. I listened to some pupils read and reviewed a sample of pupils' work. I met with four governors and had a discussion with a representative of Lancashire local authority. I reviewed a range of school documentation, including that pertaining to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, assessment and leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning. I spoke to some staff about safeguarding and a number of parents as they brought their children to school. I considered 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 21 written comments. I reviewed 11 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 28 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.