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Mrs Catherine Ashbrook
Headteacher
St Mary's and St Benedict's Roman Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Ashbrook

Short inspection of St Mary's and St Benedict's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 September 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Overall, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. However, it is clear from published information on pupils' achievement, the testimony of governors and the view of the local authority that there had been a significant decline in the education that pupils were receiving. Once you took up post in September of 2015, and with the support of the school's governing body and the local authority, you quickly addressed many of the weaknesses in teaching.

Since you took up post, there has been a considerable amount of change in staffing, including a new deputy headteacher, who started at the same time as you. About three-quarters of teaching staff have taken up post in the past two years.

A wide range of evidence demonstrates that pupils currently in the school are achieving well. Their spiritual and personal development is very strong. Pupils are happy and safe. Pupils who have been in the school for over six years said that it is much better since you took over. They recognised the significant improvement in teaching and behaviour. They said that they are free from any form of bullying and always feel safe. Governors and the local authority's representative attribute the school's rapid and significant improvement mainly to the work of you and the deputy headteacher. Teachers say that they are inspired by your passion to provide an excellent Christian education to every pupil in the school.

Over the past two years, you have had to make many difficult decisions in order to improve the school. You have always used what is best for St Mary's and St Benedict's pupils as your guide. In contrast to the views of pupils and current staff, the views of parents are divided on the quality of the school. The majority wrote to me describing how much better their children are learning and how happy they are. However, some parents raised concerns about the effect that staff turnover has had on their children's education.

By improving the assessments that teachers make of how well pupils learn and improvements to teaching, you have addressed the areas for improvement set out in the inspection report over four years ago.

You are fully aware that the improvements achieved in the teaching of some subjects, including English, have now to be made across all other subjects. You also recognise that teachers could push most-able pupils to attain even better outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders train all staff very well on how to respond to any concerns they or pupils have. The positive relationships between pupils and staff are a significant factor in ensuring that pupils are safe. Those responsible for managing safeguarding in the school have good working relationships with other agencies and do everything they can to ensure that other agencies fulfil their responsibilities.

Inspection findings

- Two years ago, teachers did not have the skills they needed to assess accurately how well pupils were learning. As a consequence, they could not identify how well their pupils were grasping the curriculum. Teachers were not pushing their pupils to learn as quickly as they ought. Throughout the school year, leaders could not accurately assess how well teachers were teaching and pupils learning. Generally, pupils did not progress quickly enough.
- You have led school reform on teaching with considerable skill. Teachers now confidently know what to expect from most of their pupils and use this understanding to prepare activities that inspire most pupils to learn very effectively across many subjects, particularly English.
- As school leaders, you can now rely on what teachers are saying about the progress that individual pupils are making. This enables you to organise much better support for those pupils who need to catch up. Teaching assistants are enthusiastic about changes that are being made to their roles. When once they mostly helped the teacher in classes, teaching assistants are now taking on greater responsibility to work with small groups, focusing on filling in the gaps in pupils' learning.
- The teaching of phonics has been good for some time. The school has adopted a scheme that suits pupils and the teaching of phonics is well organised. This has

supported the effective teaching of reading, which has been consistently good over many years.

- Improving the teaching of writing has been a considerable focus for the school over the last year and has been successful in rapidly improving rates of progress throughout the school.
- Teachers have had a lot to cope with over the past two years and should be congratulated for the considerable improvements they have made. Rightly, you and they are now turning to mathematics as the next focus for improvement. Across the school there are inconsistencies in approach of the teaching of mathematics, which cause some confusion for some pupils. There are strengths in other subjects. Through religious education, pupils have a very good understanding of religions and cultures beyond their own experience. Pupils are taught good scientific skills. However, not all subjects are taught well because you and teachers have not yet had the time to ensure that the good practice that exists in the school is extended across the whole curriculum.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are now making much better progress. The coordinator of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is now providing teachers with much better information and very good guidance on the specific needs of these pupils.
- Better tracking of pupils' progress and improved teaching, focused on the needs of pupils, and are helping disadvantaged pupils to progress much more rapidly. They are catching up with others in the school.
- The improvements seen in achievement are not as significant with the most able pupils compared to other ability groups. Teachers' expectations of what these pupils can achieve are not yet high enough, so teachers are not pushing the most able to excel.
- Your analysis of unvalidated results for last year's Year 6 pupils suggests that some of the headline figures will not reflect the improvement seen throughout the school. There are many reasons for this. As Year 6 pupils, they had a lot of catching up to do from earlier years of weak teaching. In addition, there was a larger proportion of low-ability pupils in that year, so attainment levels would naturally be lower than average. However, rates of progress showed some improvement, particularly in writing. Improvement is more obviously seen in the results for Year 2 pupils.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive. The school's ethos is excellent. There is a tangible sense of community throughout the school. Pupils are industrious in lessons. They can concentrate well and work very effectively with partners and in groups. Their behaviour is excellent. Pupils said that the worst behaviour in lessons is when a pupil talks about something unrelated to their work. Pupils play enthusiastically and happily in the playground. The school's spiritual dimension contributes significantly to pupils' personal development and beliefs. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and they attend well.
- Families and pupils who have been given support organised by the school are very appreciative about the benefits these sessions have given them. Families

and pupils have been given a wide range of support to help with mental health, poor self-esteem, stress and poor sleeping patterns.

- You are keen to seek advice. This outward-looking approach has helped you to improve the school. You have taken advantage of the very good support offered to you from the local authority and in particular with assessing pupils' achievement, monitoring their progress and auditing the school's provision for safeguarding and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that further improvements are made to pupils' achievement by:

- ensuring that more pupils attain greater depth in their understanding
- developing a whole-school strategy to improve learning in mathematics
- ensuring that pupils make strong progress across all subjects.

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

Neil Mackenzie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I worked with you throughout the day. We discussed many aspects of your school and we visited classes and scrutinised pupils' work. I met with eight members of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority. I spoke with groups of pupils during their lunchtime. I scrutinised school documents, including safeguarding checks, information about pupils' achievement and records of checks on the quality of teaching. I examined child protection information. I took account of the responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I took account of responses from staff to an inspection survey. I considered the views of parents who texted me their comments and met with one parent.