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25 January 2018

Mr David Leech  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Catholic Primary School  
Hornchurch Road  
Hornchurch  
Essex  
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Dear Mr Leech

### **Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2018, 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 2013.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You took up post in 2015 when the school was starting to decline and after a period of interim leadership. You wasted no time in making improvements to the quality of teaching and learning and ensuring that the school was a happy, safe and welcoming environment. Aply supported by the deputy headteacher and a strong governing body, you have built a leadership team who share your vision and commitment. Staff, governors, parents and carers and the local authority value your skills as a headteacher and typically describe your leadership style as a breath of fresh air.

The school continues to be at the heart of the local community, with close links to the church next door. You have developed a positive and caring ethos in the school. This is evident from the warm relationships between staff and pupils and the respect that pupils show to each other. As one parent said: 'My son is a product of his school environment: smart, polite, compassionate and well behaved.' Pupils enjoy coming to school and they make good progress. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average by the end of key stage 2. Under new leadership in the early years, children thrive. The vast majority now achieve a good level of development in Reception and are very well prepared for key stage 1.

You and your leadership team are proud of the school but are determined to improve it further. You have made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Leaders continue to work on

ensuring there is challenge for the most able pupils. Tailored programmes and structured lesson plans offer these pupils challenging activities but leaders are aware that this needs to be consistent. The new assessment system tracks pupils' performance accurately across the school. Staff are increasingly confident in reviewing assessment information and using it to plan next steps for pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

As headteacher and designated safeguarding lead, you rightly see safeguarding as the most important aspect of your role. As a result of ongoing and effective training, all staff and governors are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Weekly safeguarding bulletins also keep staff well informed and up to date. Pre-recruitment checks are completed to ensure the suitability of staff. Staff deal with any safeguarding concerns promptly and follow them up rigorously. You are not afraid to seek advice or guidance about safeguarding matters to ensure that pupils and families get the right support.

The school premises have been carefully assessed and improved to provide pupils with a secure environment. Pupils say that they feel safe, and parents agree. Pupils feel confident in talking to their teachers or using the 'worry box' if they have concerns. Themed assemblies and visits from external groups such as the NSPCC raise pupils' awareness of risks to their personal safety, including online, and how to avoid them. Older pupils receive talks from local police, for example to help prepare them for life beyond primary school.

### **Inspection findings**

- Progress in key stage 2 reading and mathematics improved in 2017 and was significantly above the national average. Writing progress, in contrast, was in line with the national average. Leaders had already identified improvements in writing as a whole-school priority and we agreed that writing would be a key line of enquiry.
- Leaders analysed historical assessment information and identified key groups of pupils, in particular boys, who were not making strong progress in writing. As a result, they adapted the curriculum to make writing tasks more relevant and interesting. Staff have received training to help them improve standards in pupils' writing, and they focus on putting these ideas into practice. The assessment system helps staff identify gaps in writing skills and pinpoints pupils' areas for development. Lessons have a greater emphasis than previously on spelling, with a more structured approach to embedding vocabulary.
- Excellent writing is celebrated around the school and pupils know exactly how to improve their writing. Work in pupils' books shows evidence of high-quality writing, particularly for middle- and high-ability pupils. However, there is still some variation across year groups in writing progress. Leaders know that upper key stage 2 pupils are suffering from a legacy of inconsistent teaching and are working to improve this. Expectations for lower-ability pupils' writing are not always high enough.

- The second key line of enquiry related to progress and attainment in reading at key stage 1. In 2017, overall attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 was above national averages. However, the proportion of pupils with lower prior attainment reaching the expected standard in reading was below average in 2016 and 2017.
- Leaders link inconsistencies in key stage 1 reading outcomes to phonics teaching in Reception. Previously, this was not as effective as it is currently. Phonics is now a strength of the school, with a highly skilled team in early years. Leaders and teachers closely monitor pupils' progress in reading. Lessons have a continued focus on phonics in Year 2 and also in Year 3 for those pupils who need it. Staff know their pupils well. They make sure that reading lessons, individual tuition and small-group sessions meet their individual needs so that pupils can move on in their learning. As pupils' reading skills progress, intervention is adapted to focus on developing pupils' comprehension skills.
- Current Year 3 pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading in 2017 are making good progress as a result of effective support and teaching. In Year 2, pupils with emerging prior attainment in reading are responding well to additional support and most are on track to meet the expected standard.
- The final key line of enquiry focused on the curriculum beyond English and mathematics. Termly overviews did not give a clear picture of other subjects taught in the school and so we agreed to look at the wider curriculum.
- Leaders have designed a broad curriculum and pupils study a range of subjects. Half-termly themes link most subjects, which allows pupils to explore themes from different angles and use their literacy and mathematical skills across subjects. For example, pupils' study of the Second World War in history inspires a variety of reading and writing activities. Science attainment is high across the school and pupils have many opportunities to investigate topics in detail. A wide range of extra-curricular trips and activities also enhance pupils' learning.
- Leaders acknowledge that while the school offers a broad curriculum, some subjects are not taught in much depth. This is particularly the case for modern foreign languages, art and design and music. Instability in the staffing of specialist teachers for these subjects has been difficult for the school and has led to inconsistencies in the quality of pupils' work.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the developments in writing so that all pupils make strong progress by the end of key stage 2
- teaching and learning in the wider curriculum is of the same high quality as in English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Brentwood, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Havering. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jude Wilson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you and other school leaders to discuss aspects of the school's work. I visited 11 lessons with you to observe the quality of teaching and learning and to speak to pupils about their work. I held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and four other governors. I met with a group of pupils and listened to them read. I had a discussion with a representative from the local authority. I evaluated the school's safeguarding procedures. I undertook a work scrutiny with school leaders, looking at a sample of work from all year groups in a range of subjects. I scrutinised documentation provided by you, including the school's self-evaluation, development plan and current pupil performance information. I considered the 118 responses to Parent View, as well as 18 staff responses and 112 pupil responses to Ofsted's questionnaires.