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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Lindsey Apps
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary
Cross Street
Chesterfield
Derbyshire
S40 4ST

Dear Mrs Apps

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary

Following my visit to the school on 23 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 December 2013.

The school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Through your thorough checks on the quality of teaching and on pupils' achievement, you and your leaders have a very precise understanding of the school's main strengths and those areas that can develop even further. You have very high expectations of your staff. You impress upon staff the need to make sure that their classroom practice ensures that pupils attain highly and make strong progress, both academically and in their personal development. All staff respond positively to these high expectations.

Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress in reading and mathematics. In both subjects, pupils' progress has been significantly above average for the last four academic years. During this time, progress in writing has not been as strong. However, you have taken effective action to ensure that the proportions of pupils who achieve at least the level expected of them at their age, and those who achieve even better, have continued to rise in this subject. The proportion of current Year 6 pupils who are on track to achieve in excess of the standard expected of them in writing is above the national average for 2017.

You have responded effectively to the areas for improvement from the last

inspection. You have widened the curriculum, to put more emphasis on art, history and geography. In this, you have ensured that all pupils, including the most able, have regular, effective opportunities to develop further their writing skills, including handwriting.

Teachers carefully plan lessons to provide pupils with appropriate levels of challenge to become secure in their learning. Teachers set pupils activities which encourage them to engage well with their learning. Pupils respond well to the challenges teachers set them. They are keen to complete the more difficult tasks, including 'stretch-it tasks', which encourage pupils to think deeply about their learning. Many pupils I met said that they enjoy their lessons because teachers make learning fun and provide them with effective support to attain well.

Teachers share your high expectations of what pupils can achieve across all subjects. They regularly check on pupils' progress and provide timely support to ensure that pupils achieve at least the standard expected of them for their age, if not better. Senior leaders regularly discuss pupils' progress with teachers. These discussions ensure that teachers and leaders alike have a precise understanding of pupils' progress, and the support pupils need to attain highly.

You have given a high priority to providing your staff with regular training to develop their classroom practice further. You use effective practice that you have found in other schools as the basis of this training. You encourage your staff to work with each other and with professionals from other schools. By doing this, you provide highly effective opportunities for staff to learn from the practice of others. Staff respond well to this training, setting themselves challenging targets to sharpen their classroom practice further. This has been crucial to ensure that pupils make strong progress in reading and mathematics, and that attainment continues to rise rapidly in writing. You regularly check on the success of your teachers to achieve the targets they set themselves, and provide appropriate support and challenge.

Pupils demonstrate excellent behaviour, both in their social times and in their approach to their lessons. This is due to your highly effective use of rewards to encourage pupils to engage positively with their learning. Pupils are ambitious to attain such recognition as 'star of the day', the weekly 'golden child' and the termly 'learning hero'. These rewards encourage pupils to be kind towards each other, to work hard in their lessons and to demonstrate confidence and resilience.

Governors share your determination to ensure that the school's provision fully meets pupils' learning and welfare needs. Governors have a precise understanding of the effectiveness of the school's provision, including through their visits to lessons, and their meetings with staff and with pupils. Governors are equally demanding of themselves, and regularly undertake training to ensure that the level of support and challenge they offer leaders is fully effective.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding regularly check on pupils' welfare. When they

have a concern about a pupil's well-being, they are quick to make contact with parents and carers and with other agencies, where this is appropriate. Leaders recognise the importance of being tenacious in their actions to support a pupil about whom they have a safeguarding concern, to ensure that the pupil receives the support that they need. You and other senior leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality.

All staff know that keeping pupils safe is everyone's responsibility. They undertake regular safeguarding training that secures their knowledge of the different types of abuse and the signs to look for. Staff know the importance of being vigilant, and of taking immediate action when they have a safeguarding concern about a pupil.

Pupils learn how to be safe, including when online and when out in the local community. The pupils I met said they feel safe at the school and they can share any worries that they have with adults, either in person or through the 'worry box'. Pupils are confident that adults will take effective action to resolve their concerns. All adults who responded to the online survey, Parent View, and who spoke with me personally, said that adults at the school look after their child well.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard for their age in writing improved to be in line with the national average in 2017. The proportion of those pupils who achieved above the standard expected of them was also in line with the national average. This improvement in pupils' attainment in writing was due to the closer focus that you and the staff have placed upon developing pupils' communication skills in all subjects, particularly their accurate use of spelling and punctuation, and their editing skills.
- The school's performance information indicates that pupils' attainment in writing continues to improve for current pupils across all years, including in the Reception Year, Year 2 and Year 6. This includes the proportion of pupils who achieve standards above those expected for their age, particularly in key stage 2. Leaders, however, are rightly focused on ensuring that the levels of attainment in writing match the very high levels pupils have attained in reading and mathematics for the past four academic years.
- Boys attain as well as girls, particularly at key stage 2. This is due to leaders' efforts to ensure that the curriculum meets boys' interests and the rewards system encourages boys to adopt positive attitudes to lessons. These strategies ensure that boys engage well with their learning and aim to attain highly.
- In 2017, the proportion of Year 2 pupils who achieved standards above those expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics was lower than that which pupils achieved in previous academic years. Leaders have been quick to identify why this was the case. In so doing, they have ensured that teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment in key stage 1 is consistently precise. They have also ensured that pupils regularly receive challenging work in all subjects. As a result, a greater proportion of current Year 2 pupils, including the most able, are

on track to achieve the higher standard of attainment in all three subjects.

- Leaders have put into place well-targeted support to ensure that pupils continue to attend regularly. As a result, the level of absence, including the proportion of pupils who are absent from school regularly, continues to be well below the national average, and is reducing even further.
- Disadvantaged pupils' absence, which previously was above the national average and rising, is now well below that average. The proportion of these pupils who are regularly absent from school is also well below average. This is due to leaders' smarter use of additional government funding, the pupil premium, to support these pupils to attend regularly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to sharpen the teaching of writing across all year groups, to make sure that pupils' attainment in this subject continues to rise and matches the very high levels of attainment that they achieve in reading and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, a selection of staff and three governors. I observed learning in all year groups with you, the headteacher, and the deputy headteacher. During these visits to lessons, I spoke with pupils and looked at their books. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the day. I spoke with pupils when I observed behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime, and when I met formally with a selection of pupils from Years 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. I heard three pupils read. I met with the school's improvement partner. I looked at a range of school documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, pupils' attainment and progress and the use of the pupil premium funding. I took into account the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's recruitment procedures and records of the checks made on new staff and volunteers. I took into account the 68 responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, including the 67 responses to the free-text service. I considered the 21 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 32 responses to the pupils' survey. At the end of the day, I gave feedback to you, other senior leaders and members of the governing body.