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Mr Damian Kay  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Kay

### **Short inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

This is a happy and welcoming school. Pupils are well behaved, polite and motivated to learn. Pupils that I spoke to were complimentary about the school. They said that learning is fun. Pupils said that bullying and name-calling are both rare. This was reflected in the responses to the pupils' survey. Pupils said that behaviour was typically good. They said that sometimes they fall out and bicker but that adults are always there to help them. The older pupils that I spoke to relish the many responsibilities that they have. For example, they have the opportunity to be eco monitors, school councillors or members of the ethos group. All members of Year 6 are 'senior students'. These pupils told me that they are responsible for setting a good example to the other pupils in school, in the dining hall and in the playground.

Pupils benefit from the use of a sensory space to help them with social, emotional and friendship issues. You cater for the emotional needs of the pupils well. Staff

pick up the pupils' worries in a confidential manner and deal with them sensitively.

Parents and carers are complimentary about this school. They say that you and the staff are visible and approachable in the playground each day. Parents told me that you support them well. Responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were extremely positive, as were the many free-text responses. One parent, with a view typical of many, said, 'It is a well-managed school that provides a nurturing and supportive environment for its pupils. The teachers are clearly committed to providing pupils with an excellent standard of education.'

Governors are supportive of the school. They are clear about the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. They are proactive in supporting you and the staff. Governors ask challenging questions to ensure that they have a full understanding of assessment information. They support you and challenge you in equal measure. Governors are aware of their statutory responsibilities.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked school leaders to improve the quality of teaching. Since you and your deputy took up post, you have monitored the quality of teaching and learning carefully. Over time, you have tailored your monitoring activities to ensure that you identify actions that are relevant and specific to the weaknesses you see. This year, you simplified the process for providing staff with feedback. Senior leaders observe teaching, monitor the quality of pupils' books and speak to the pupils about their work. Your recent monitoring highlighted the fact that teachers did not always use questioning well to move learning on. As a result, you invested in whole-staff training on the use of different questioning techniques.

Together, we observed teachers utilising a wide range of strategies to improve learning. For example, in Year 6 we observed the teacher skilfully posing questions to tease out extra learning about fractions to challenge the most able pupils. In the continuous effort to improve teaching, you ensure that teachers share best practice. This is commonplace across the school. We saw an example of this in Year 3, where a teaching assistant was delivering a French lesson.

As a consequence of your actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment, outcomes for pupils have continued to improve. Published performance information shows that a high percentage of children typically achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Pupils in Year 1 typically achieve better in the phonics screening check than other pupils nationally. Pupils leave key stage 1 with results in line with national averages and with high proportions of pupils at the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of key stage 2, the majority of pupils achieve the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics, with increased numbers achieving the higher standards.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school site is secure and signing-in procedures are robust. The school's single central record is accurate and contains all the relevant information. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are all in place. Staff have received

relevant safeguarding and 'Prevent' training. Where members of staff are new, you have arranged training. Several members of the senior leadership team and governing body have been trained in safer recruitment.

Members of staff that I spoke to knew about the safeguarding procedures in the school. You work well with a range of outside agencies, including children's social care and school health. Pupils say that they feel safe in this school. Parents who responded to the Ofsted surveys and those who I spoke to said that they felt that their children are safe.

## **Inspection findings**

- Published performance information shows that progress in mathematics and reading at the end of key stage 2 is above the national average, whereas progress in writing has been no better than average for the last two years. Records of monitoring activities show that you have engaged in a range of writing moderation activities, both in school and with other schools in the locality. The local authority moderated Year 6 writing in 2016 and agreed that your teachers' assessments were accurate. Your own monitoring records show that although pupils achieved very well in the Year 6 grammar, punctuation and spelling test, they did not always transfer these skills to their writing. As a result, school training has focused on the improvement of writing. For example, in key stage 1, you monitor the progress of pupils more clearly to ensure that more reach the higher standards. In key stage 2, there is now a more focused approach to the application of grammar in writing.
- In the classes that we visited, we saw examples of pupils using success criteria to improve their writing. From observing lessons, looking at pupils' books and viewing records of monitoring and assessment we could see that all pupils make good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, pupils in Years 2, 5 and 6 do not make as much progress in writing as they do in mathematics and reading. Together, we agreed that the actions you have put in place need to continue. This is so that in writing, more pupils match the very high standards that are achieved in mathematics and reading by the end of key stage 2.
- From observing lessons, talking to pupils and looking at their books, we could see evidence that writing is strong across the curriculum. Handwriting is a strength in the majority of classes and presentation is typically good. Pupils' books show that the most able pupils are challenged to use a wide range of vocabulary and an increasing range of writing techniques. For example, in Year 2 we looked at examples of writing in science. Pupils write careful predictions of what they think plants might need in order to grow. Pupils that I spoke to told me about their writing and what they needed to do to improve it. We observed pupils in the Reception class writing about the troll under the bridge. We looked at many examples of pupils editing and redrafting their work across different year groups. You encourage pupils to question each other about their work. Reading is actively promoted across the school. Each class has access to a range of high-quality texts.

- Pupils benefit from a broad and exciting curriculum, which is relevant and up to date. For example, pupils across the school recently completed work in relation to influential women as part of their work on international women's day. You facilitate visits to enhance the curriculum. Pupils in Year 2 benefited from a visit from a dentist and a paramedic as part of their work on keeping healthy. You have invited grandparents and older visitors to speak to the pupils about how things were in the past. You promote sport well across the school. Pupils profit from a range of in-school and extra-curricular sporting activities, including football, hockey, dodgeball and cross-country running. You have made enhancements to the playground to ensure that the pupils are healthy, safe and active. Work in topic books is of a high standard. Pupils said that they enjoy visits to museums and art galleries. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 talked with enthusiasm about their trip to Tatton Park to learn about the Saxons as part of their history work. Enquiry skills are apparent across a range of subjects. In Year 5, pupils investigate levers as part of their work on board games. They create models to explore inclined slopes. Pupils are actively involved in curriculum planning and where possible you ensure that they have a say in what they want to learn. Progression of skills can be seen from key stage 1 through to the end of key stage 2 across a range of subjects. For example, in geography, map work progressively becomes more challenging as pupils move through the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils reach the highest standards in writing by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

With you, I carried out visits to classes in all year groups. I examined a range of school documentation, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation. I looked at assessment information and records of monitoring activities. I scrutinised the school's single central record and checked all records of safeguarding and staff recruitment. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I met six members of the governing board, including the chair of governors. I considered the 75 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I considered the 131 pupils' survey responses and the 20 staff survey responses. I considered the 50 free-text responses. I spoke to parents

at the start of the school day. I spoke to pupils at lunchtime and in the classes that we visited.