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Mrs Alison Ashworth
Executive Headteacher
St Mary's Primary School Knaresborough, A Voluntary Catholic Academy
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Dear Mrs Ashworth

Short inspection of St Mary's Primary School Knaresborough, A Voluntary Catholic Academy

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in 2012.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

The ethos of St Mary's ensures this is an inclusive school. You and the head of school know the pupils well and have a thorough understanding of their needs. One parent expressed your commitment to the school, stating, 'Pupils are the centre of their motivation.' The pastoral support for Travellers and transient pupils is highly effective and you successfully engage with some 'hard to reach' families. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities means that some pupils with a high level of medical needs are fully integrated into the life of the school so they can happily learn and play alongside their peers.

Nearly all pupils who responded to the inspection survey said they enjoyed coming to school; this was further supported by the pupils to whom I spoke. They consider pupil behaviour to be good. This is reflected in the good conduct observed in lessons and the presentation of their work, particularly in their mathematics books. The response from parents was more mixed. While the majority of parents who completed Parent View would recommend the school, a minority feel the school does not respond well to their concerns.

Pupils' achievement by the end of key stage 2 is good in reading, writing and mathematics. In writing, pupils' progress is well above average and their attainment is similar to the national average, including those pupils writing at a higher standard. In reading, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is in the top 20% of

schools. Standards at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly in line with the national average.

Governors monitor how well pupils are doing in school: they track the progress of different pupils and keep a keen eye on levels of attendance. The school's conversion to an academy as part of the Bishop Wheeler Academy Trust has been particularly beneficial in sharing good practice to improve the quality of teaching. This has had a strong impact, particularly in key stage 2.

The roles of subject leaders have been effectively developed. These leaders are well informed and have high levels of expertise, with responsibility to monitor and evaluate their subjects. They play a key role in leading the school forward and this has resulted in some good pupil achievement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils told me they feel safe in school and are confident in confiding in an adult if they are worried. The majority of parents concur with this view. Pupils understand how to stay safe in different situations, including on the internet. They have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying and the procedures for dealing with it. They are confident that teachers use discipline fairly.

Leaders have created a safe culture to take care of pupils and ensure that procedures are effectively implemented to protect them. Staff and governors understand their obligations for safeguarding and take appropriate action when necessary. They liaise with outside agencies and this provides pupils and families with the support they need. Procedures and policies are fit for purpose. All members of staff are checked for their suitability to work with children. The academy trust is now devising a recruitment policy to ensure that procedures for safe recruitment are consistent across all its schools.

The school is highly vigilant in ensuring that pupils attend school regularly. There are robust systems in place to follow up absences on the first day. Where necessary, they involve external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe when not in school.

Inspection findings

- Following the school's previous inspection, the school was tasked with improving the quality of teaching so it is consistent across the school. This has been effective in key stage 2, which has resulted in good outcomes by the time pupils leave the school.
- During the inspection, together we looked at the teaching of mathematics, particularly of the middle-ability pupils in upper key stage 2. There is some strong teaching in Years 5 and 6 where teachers have good subject knowledge and challenge pupils well.
- Our observation of mathematics lessons showed that pupils able to reflect on

their own learning and articulate their reasoning. Pupils' mathematics books show that they are also able to record this reasoning in considerable depth. They set their work out clearly and accurately when writing down their calculations. Pupils' 'workings out' are also recorded neatly, providing a clear picture of how they have concluded their answer.

- The quality of teaching of the younger pupils, particularly in phonics, is still variable and this is reflected in a gradual decline in the number of pupils achieving the expected standard at the end of Year 1. The number of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 2 last year was also below the national average.
- You have recently reviewed the school's approach to reading and invested in new reading books. When hearing the younger pupils read, they confidently tackled some difficult and unfamiliar vocabulary. The new books the school has recently purchased certainly appealed to the boy readers and promoted their enjoyment of reading.
- Many children enter the Reception class with skills in communication and language below those normally expected for their age. Last year's cohort had an exceptionally high number of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Teaching in the early years foundation stage has not been consistent due to staffing changes. Less experienced teachers have not received the professional development and support they require to ensure that they have a clear vision of high-quality provision, particularly how learning should be promoted in the outside area.
- The recently imposed restriction of space for those children entitled to early years provision has had a negative impact on the quality of learning for this age group. The outside area appears 'tired': resources are showing signs of wear and tear. There are insufficient well-planned activities to enhance the children's early reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- Leaders have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses but these are not accurately reflected in the school's improvement plan. This document lacks clarity in setting out, clearly, the end-of-year expectations. The lack of meaningful milestones or quantifiable targets makes it difficult for governors to hold the school to account.
- The school's website is in the process of being updated to be in line with the requirements for an academy. Currently, it is not fully compliant in relation to the school's pupil premium strategy, providing information about governors, the publication of an accessibility plan and compliance with its public sector equality duty.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics in the Reception class and key stage 1 classes is securely good
- the outside area accessed by children in the early years foundation stage provides quality activities across all areas of learning
- the school improvement plan provides clarity by which to hold leaders to account
- the website complies fully with statutory requirements.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds (RC), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Karen Heath
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school and subject leaders for mathematics to discuss aspects of the school's work. You shared your own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school and your improvement plans. With your head of school, we observed several lessons, including phonics and mathematics and in the Reception class. Together with your subject leaders, I looked at pupils' mathematics books.

I reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to the safety and welfare of children. I spoke to pupils about behaviour, safety and their enjoyment of school as well as considering the views of 37 pupils through responses to the online survey. I heard pupils in Years 1 and 2 read and discussed their enjoyment and experience of reading. I observed the provision in the school's breakfast club. I considered the 43 responses from parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, as well as comments in letters I received.

I met with the chair of the governing body and three other members of the governing body, the accounting officer of the academy as well as a representative from the local authority. I considered the views of the 13 staff who responded to the staff survey.