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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 May 2018

Mr Christopher Wright
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Whitstable
Northwood Road
Whitstable
Kent
CT5 2EY

Dear Mr Wright

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Whitstable

Following my visit to the school on 25 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

Since taking up your appointment as headteacher in April 2016, you have established an effective working relationship with the trust, local governing body and staff. Together, you have pursued high aspirations and show a strong determination to help all pupils achieve their potential. You know the school well. As leaders you have the confidence of parents, carers and the wider community to lead the school forward. Staff are proud to be part of a successful team and enjoy working at the school.

Leaders have maintained the strengths recognised by the previous inspection in the predecessor school. These included strong leadership, the good quality of teaching and pupils' progress; the early years, pupils' attitudes and behaviour, and the partnership with parents were also recognised as strengths. Inspectors also identified the need to challenge the most able pupils, to improve homework provision and to make more effective use of outdoor areas and resources. In mathematics, the most able pupils now attain higher standards than in other schools nationally. Most parents and pupils enjoy the challenge of the new homework grids, and children in the early years benefit from a broad range of outdoor activities to support progress in a wide range of subjects.

Since the previous inspection, school leaders have continued the process of development planning and self-review, identifying priorities to improve the school. For example, you have identified accurately the need to focus on writing and to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders monitor the plan's implementation carefully to ensure that staffing and resources are used to raise

standards effectively.

All staff work together closely to make sure that each pupil gets the help that they need. Pupils are known as individuals and supported successfully to take part in school activities. Pupils are cared for well. As a result, they settle into school quickly. Pupils behave well and enjoy their time in school.

During our visits to classrooms, we saw examples of enthusiastic teaching that inspired pupils to take part in a range of tasks. Pupils benefit from working together and discussing their learning. They enjoy taking part in a variety of activities, including debating responsibility for the tragedy of the Titanic, retelling the story of the life of Queen Elizabeth II, and solving problems with big numbers. Staff question pupils skilfully to help them think carefully and to learn quickly. As a result of good teaching, most pupils are making good progress in reading and mathematics. However, progress in writing is lower than in other schools nationally and, currently, too few disadvantaged pupils attain the higher standards in writing and mathematics.

Pupils are keen to talk about their school and speak politely, happily and confidently. Leaders provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities and pupils are encouraged to participate. Pupils enjoy taking part in community projects at the 'Mini-Vinnies Club', cycle training, instrumental tuition, and a wide range of sporting activities and singing. These activities contribute effectively to pupils' personal development and support their progress in a range of subjects. Pupils say that they enjoy being challenged, and some pupils would like more challenging work to make them think even harder.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Staff are trained regularly and records are up to date. As necessary, leaders work with outside agencies to provide effective support for pupils and families, and this is kept under careful review. Staff know how to keep pupils safe and what to do if they have a concern. Pupils are happy to talk to staff if they have a problem and the majority of pupils are confident that effective action will be taken. The curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe. As a result, they have a good knowledge of online safety, and are aware of the importance of water and railway safety. Pupils recognise that a 'safe adult' will always be wearing an identification badge in school.

The school's website contains some useful information for parents, including advice about e-safety. The majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and all staff, are confident that pupils are safe at school.

The school is maintained well and is being improved regularly. The addition of an artificial grass area has increased the extent of sporting opportunities on offer, helping to promote pupils' physical development further.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on the progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils in mathematics and writing, and how effectively school leaders are raising standards in writing at key stage 2. We also agreed to look at how successfully leaders are maintaining recent improvements in pupils' attendance.
- Disadvantaged pupils are now challenged to achieve high standards in mathematics. Leaders use extra funding for these pupils with increasing effectiveness. For example, pupils have piano lessons to develop skills of concentration and perseverance. Staff use tracking information to identify where pupils need to be extended or to help them catch up. Extra adults work successfully with pupils in class and groups, and staff provide mathematical activities to be completed at home. Pupils enjoy the challenge of problem-solving and reasoning activities. Consequently, many disadvantaged pupils are now attaining higher standards than previously. However, as we agreed, more work is needed to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils achieve their potential in mathematics, as some changes have taken place recently.
- Leaders analyse tracking information regularly and have accurately identified progress in writing as a point for action. Pupils enjoy writing and talk enthusiastically about their work. Staff structure new writing ideas carefully, providing pupils with effective support and challenge. There is a strong emphasis on vocabulary and, as a result, pupils proactively collect new words. Staff make meaningful links to topics in other subject areas, for example writing a report in science and a diary in history. Pupils have opportunities to explore these ideas through drama. As a consequence, pupils' progress in writing is beginning to accelerate. However, as we discussed, some parents are concerned that their children are not fulfilling their potential. Currently, too few pupils are attaining the standards in writing of which they are capable, and too few disadvantaged pupils are attaining high standards.
- In 2017, pupils' overall attendance improved to well above average. All groups of pupils were similarly strong, with the exception of those who have high levels of special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities with medical needs. Leaders and governors continue to monitor closely pupils with low rates of attendance. Governors consider requests for leave very carefully. Pupils and their families are provided with support as needed, for example with the provision of before- and after-school care. Pupils appreciate rewards for attending school and know that it is important to come to school to learn. Effective steps are taken to improve the attendance of the small number of pupils with low attendance. As a result, the attendance of all pupils is currently above national averages, except for those who have high levels of SEN and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are challenged consistently to achieve

the higher standards in writing.

- pupils who are disadvantaged are enabled to achieve high standards in mathematics.
- pupils' attendance continues to improve, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have high levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Southwark, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Addison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders and the chair of the governing body accompanied by the chair of the governors' curriculum committee. I also met a group of pupils from Years 2 to 6, and a representative from the multi-academy trust, Kent Catholic Schools Partnership. Senior staff accompanied me on visits to classrooms in all year groups, where I observed learning, spoke to pupils and looked at their work. A range of mathematics and literacy books were reviewed with yourself and senior leaders. I observed pupils' behaviour in the classrooms and around the school. I took into account 114 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, reviewed 81 free-text responses and considered 32 online questionnaires from staff and 115 from pupils. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information on the school's website, safety records, minutes of meetings, various policies and pupil progress information.