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Mr Jonathan Wynn  
Headteacher  
The St. Mary's CofE Primary School  
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Dear Mr Wynn

### **Short inspection of The St. Mary's CofE Primary School**

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 November 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Many parents and carers choose to send their children to your school, despite not living in the local area, because of the 'family feel'. They value the fact that every child is known as an individual. The vast majority of parents are positive about the school and the progress that their children are making. Ninety-seven per cent of parents who completed Ofsted's Parent View online questionnaire state that they would recommend the school. Parents appreciate the opportunities their children have to participate in a range of sporting activities such as archery, curling and football. Since you became headteacher in September 2016, you have further developed the positive relationships with parents. They appreciate your openness and say how approachable you are. You know their children's strengths and the areas where support and challenge are needed to help them reach the highest levels. You have high aspirations for the pupils in your care.

Since the last inspection the school has joined with two other schools to form The Small Schools Multi Academy Trust. This is providing additional capacity and expertise to make further improvements. You are building well on the previous success of the school. Leadership is distributed across the multi-academy trust to draw on a wide range of expertise. Roles and responsibilities are clear. Leaders are dedicated and keen to make a difference. Together, you work closely to check standards across the school. Your self-evaluation is accurate and identifies the key

priorities for development. You are outward-looking and actively encourage an external view. You collaborate with other local schools, including a teaching school. These links provide good opportunities for further development and training. In some situations, your staff are leading the training for other schools and trainee teachers. Exemplary leadership is being developed at all levels.

Rigorous performance management processes ensure that expectations are understood by everyone. Regular training and development is provided for all staff to develop their teaching skills further. A comprehensive induction programme is in place for staff new to the school. New staff comment on the importance of this in helping them settle into the school. You coach and mentor staff to ensure a consistent approach to teaching and learning. This is improving the quality of teaching across the school. The same high standards can be seen in many classrooms. Staff say that this is a nurturing school; they value the opportunities to develop both professionally and personally.

Pupils enter the school with skills typical of their age. Children have been able to access nursery provision since September 2017. They are settled and engage happily in a range of tasks. During the inspection the very youngest children were already beginning to count, subtract and take turns; they worked with obvious enjoyment and enthusiasm. Over time, pupils make good progress. The proportion of children who leave the early years with a good level of development is often above the levels seen nationally. This strong progress continues in key stages 1 and 2. In 2017, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was higher than national. Significant numbers of pupils also reached the higher levels. You have designed and implemented a robust assessment and tracking system. This enables you to monitor individual pupils' progress more closely. Any dip in outcomes, such as that seen in 2016, is analysed carefully. You ensure that rapid action is taken to address the issues identified. Regular monitoring, observations of teaching and work scrutiny are used effectively to check on the impact of actions taken.

The executive headteacher and directors provide you with support and challenge in equal measure. They have a wealth of skills and expertise to call upon. They have a clear understanding of their statutory functions and responsibilities. The well-being of pupils and staff is at the centre of their work. They are committed and enthusiastic about their work. Through regular meetings, the directors track the impact of developments across the school and the progress that the pupils are making. Directors check out what they have been told by visiting the school to see for themselves. They share your vision and ambition for the school.

You have addressed the areas identified for improvement during the inspection of your predecessor school. Much work has been done to improve the teaching of mathematics and ensure that every child is challenged enough with work that ensures their good progress. Pupils develop secure reasoning and problem-solving skills through regular practice. This enables more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to reach greater depth at the end of key stage 2. Writing continues to be a focus for improvement and was explored further during this inspection.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The curriculum is highly effective in providing opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe. There is a strong focus on e-safety in the computing curriculum and there are regular opportunities to discuss relationships in personal, social, health and economic education. During the inspection, older pupils engaged in thoughtful discussion about how to deal with peer pressure. Pupils have a good understanding of what to do if they are worried or anxious about something.

Leaders have ensured that robust systems are in place to keep children safe. Appropriate training is provided for staff and governors. Consequently, all members of the school community are clear about their responsibilities. Staff are vigilant. They know that they can discuss any concern, no matter how small, with the designated safeguarding leader. The safeguarding director monitors closely the effectiveness of child-protection policies and procedures. Effective support is provided to families when needed, and there are good links with a range of external agencies.

## **Inspection findings**

- My first focus for the inspection was to look at the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they represent) and reading. In 2016, there was a significant drop in the number of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. Fewer pupils attained greater depth in reading that year also.
- Leaders addressed these issues swiftly. Staff skilled in the teaching of phonics have been appointed. They model sounds accurately and correct pupils quickly when errors are made. Regular phonics sessions from the earliest age ensure that pupils learn new sounds, practise writing and make connections in their learning. Effective assessment enables teachers to plan specifically for individual pupils' needs. Pupils struggling to develop a secure understanding are supported through effective interventions. Additional adults are skilled in finding extra opportunities for these pupils to practise their letters and sounds. Pupils read regularly and are encouraged to use letter sounds when writing to improve spelling. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check has increased.
- A text-based approach to the teaching of literacy has been introduced. This exposes pupils to a wide range of books and genres. Interesting and exciting books with a highly challenging vocabulary are chosen by staff. These are explored in detail during structured teaching sessions. Specific reading techniques are taught in preparation for the end-of-key-stage assessments. Pupils develop their comprehension skills and work together to find evidence in the text to support their answers to questions. Pupils across the school have an obvious love of reading. This is celebrated and encouraged. They have favourite authors and can explain why they like them. Many more pupils are reaching the higher levels in their reading as a result of this new approach.
- The second focus was to look at the actions leaders are taking to improve boys'

attainment and progress in writing. In some year groups, boys made less progress than girls in writing. Fewer attained at the higher levels. Leaders undertake a careful and thorough analysis of assessment data on a regular basis. They track key groups and individuals. The headteacher has an excellent understanding of boys' levels of attainment and rates of progress. The text-based approach to the teaching of literacy is highly effective in engaging boys in learning. The picture books and fast-paced novels that are used interest them. This is resulting in boys developing a wider vocabulary, which they are using to good effect in their writing. Boys are given many opportunities to talk through what they want to write. They rehearse their sentences before putting pen to paper. This is helping them develop confidence as writers. 'Wow' moments and opportunities to write in a wide variety of subjects, such as science and history, are effective in engaging boys. They want to write and do so with enthusiasm. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls appears to be closing. Boys are making more rapid progress and more boys are set to attain at the highest levels this year.

- Another area of focus was on the quality of teaching across the school. Leaders know where the strongest teaching is. They make their expectations about the quality of teaching explicit. Leaders support staff effectively to develop greater challenge and achieve the consistently high standards expected. Leaders use professional development effectively to develop the quality of teaching further. It is structured and strategically planned. Staff learn from each other and good practice across the multi-academy trust is shared. Staff say that having common ground and a shared vision has strengthened the school. Leaders state that there is more consistent, good practice across the school than previously.
- New assessment systems devised by the headteacher enable all staff to be acutely aware of individual pupils and their specific needs. This enables teachers' planning to be sharply focused. The most able pupils are a group of particular focus. Teachers and leaders monitor their progress and can see where further challenge is needed. All staff know the pupils well. They check pupils' books and identify the next steps which will enable pupils to achieve at the highest levels. Adults develop a good focus on learning with all pupils. This is helping pupils to make stronger progress. Relationships are positive and classrooms have a buzz of learning about them.
- Where teaching does not meet leaders' very high expectations, opportunities are missed to fine tune and deepen pupils' knowledge. Teachers do not have high expectations and allow pupils' work to vary in its quality. Time is not always used productively. Adults miss chances to involve the pupils in active learning and end up doing more than the children.
- A further area for exploration during the inspection was the curriculum. This has been developed across the multi-academy trust using the expertise of subject leaders. There is a clear rationale for the curriculum's design. Leaders ensure that skills and knowledge are developed progressively in a wide range of subjects. Engaging themes within single subjects help pupils to think as geographers, historians and scientists. Frequent opportunities to write at length are provided. Pupils' books show that teachers have consistently high expectations for presentation, handwriting and spelling.

- The curriculum also offers many first-hand experiences, visits and 'wow' moments. Pupils have visited places such as the National Memorial Arboretum and Pizza Express. Opportunities to develop artistic, creative and sporting skills are integral. Pupils could talk in detail about their learning. They talked enthusiastically about work they had completed on Banksy and the 3D models they had created in the style of Gaudi. Subject leaders regularly monitor the progress pupils make and the quality of teaching. They check pupils' books for subject coverage and whether expectations of pupils are high enough. They offer advice and review teachers' planning to ensure that work meets pupils' needs and interests. The curriculum is highly effective in engaging pupils in their learning
- Finally, I looked at personal development, behaviour and well-being. At the inspection of the predecessor school this was graded as outstanding. However, leaders were cautious, and in their self-evaluation, suggested it is good. Throughout the inspection, pupils of all ages conducted themselves extremely well. They are polite, courteous and show respect to all those around them. Pupils hold doors open, tidy up and work cooperatively. They praise one another when they recognise something good. Pupils have a good understanding of the rules and expectations for behaviour. Attendance continues to be above national levels. Leaders monitor and follow up any absence rigorously. They have secure links with families of children who are persistently absent and arrange for pupils to attend other local schools while travelling. By the end of Year 6, the large majority of pupils have well developed attitudes to their work. They take ownership of what they are doing. They are resilient and know what to do for themselves if they are stuck. They have a real desire to improve their work. Their excellent behaviour and attitude to work prepares them well for the move to secondary school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching continues to develop so that it matches the best that can be found in the school
- outcomes continue to rise so that more pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, reach the higher levels.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

- This is the first inspection since the school converted to an academy and joined The Small Schools Multi Academy Trust (TSSMAT) in 2015.
- I held discussions with you and the executive headteacher about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's self-evaluation and plans for future improvement. We discussed information about pupils' current progress and attainment and talked about significant changes since the inspection of your predecessor school.
- I met with a group of three directors including the chair. I also met with a group of teaching and non-teaching staff. I considered the six responses to the staff questionnaire.
- I carried out learning walks and visits to classrooms with you to look at the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' learning and progress. During these visits I spoke with pupils and discussed their work with them. I looked at a range of pupils' books with you and the executive headteacher.
- I talked to a group of pupils to seek their views.
- I met with parents before school started and considered the 29 responses to Ofsted's Parent View online questionnaire. I also considered the nine free-text responses and an email message sent by a parent at the school.
- I looked at a range of documents including: your school self-evaluation document and school development plan; minutes of directors' meetings; and procedures for safeguarding and for checking the suitability of staff to work with pupils.
- I checked the school website.