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15 October 2018

Mr Andrew Tarrant  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Catholic Primary School  
Penn Hill Road  
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Dear Mr Tarrant

### **Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 February 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your staff team maintain what one parent described as 'a wonderfully inclusive and happy school with a holistic approach to education'. All of the staff members who responded to the staff questionnaire say that they are proud to work at the school. You are ably assisted by the deputy headteacher who effectively oversees the welfare of pupils and staff.

Parents who spoke with me during the inspection told me that their children were happy and safe. They noted the lengths that teachers and support staff go to in order to meet pupils' individual needs. A few parents suggested that they would like more information about what their children were learning. This, they noted, would enable them to support learning at home. You agreed that there was insufficient information on the school website to show what pupils in each year group are learning in each subject. You also pointed out that improving communication with parents and informing them about the curriculum has been identified as a priority.

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to strengthen pupils' progress in writing, especially that of boys. This formed a line of enquiry for this inspection. You were also asked to strengthen leadership by making sure that you measured the success of strategic plans by looking at how well they helped pupils to improve.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant turnover of governors at the school. Governors understand their responsibility for monitoring the quality of education

provided by the school and they ask challenging questions to school leaders. During the inspection, you showed me how your school improvement priorities are centred on improving pupils' outcomes. Governors described how their purposeful monitoring activities help them to assess the quality of education provided by the school. Governors have a good grasp of assessment information and know how well pupils are performing across the school. They have set appropriate priorities and are determined to give you and your staff their full support as the school continues to improve.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make sure that all staff are well trained and that safeguarding records are accurate. Appropriate checks are made of staff before they start employment. Governors ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school by carrying out regular checks to make sure that policies are followed effectively. Parents and pupils overwhelmingly agree that the school keeps everyone safe.

Pupils told me how they stay safe in school, in the community and when online. They said that bullying was very rare and were confident that staff would deal effectively with any issues. You are aware that a very small number of parents mentioned bullying incidents, and how the school has addressed these concerns, in their free-text responses. Your records show that any concerns about behaviour are dealt with effectively. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour in classes and at breaktimes was exemplary. I was particularly impressed by the enthusiasm for learning shown by pupils when I asked them questions about how they were being challenged to think deeply by their teachers.

### **Inspection findings**

At the start of the inspection, we agreed the particular aspects of the school's work on which the inspection would focus.

- The first line of enquiry considered how effectively leaders ensure that teachers challenge pupils to achieve the higher standards in mathematics. In 2016, pupils made strong progress in mathematics in key stage 2, placing the school in the top 20% nationally for progress in the subject. However, progress was weaker in 2017, with fewer pupils reaching the higher standard.
- Leaders have introduced a different approach to teaching and learning in mathematics since the previous inspection. Teachers across key stage 2 give pupils increasingly challenging tasks, and the most able pupils are clearly being stretched so that they can tackle work at the higher level. During our scrutiny of pupils' workbooks and our visits to classrooms, we found examples of pupils enjoying applying their mathematical knowledge as they solved complex problems. For example, Year 6 pupils were using their understanding of mathematical equations to solve algebraic problems. One pupil told me, 'I am using the inverse operation to solve this. Sometimes it's hard but I love it!' The most recent progress information shows that progress in mathematics improved at key stage 2 in 2018, with more than a quarter of the previous Year 6 cohort reaching the higher standard.

- The next line of enquiry assessed how leaders ensure that boys in key stage 2 are challenged to make good progress in writing. This was set as a requirement following the previous inspection. Overall, writing progress was in line with the national averages in 2016 and 2017. During this time, girls and boys achieved similar standards in writing. However, boys made weaker progress than girls.
- Current pupils' progress information shows that writing standards are rising across key stage 2 for both girls and boys. However, scrutiny of writing in English books suggests that while boys are enjoying their writing activities, they are not challenged sufficiently to use higher-level writing skills. Teachers expect pupils to use accurate spellings and a wide range of punctuation when writing in subjects other than English. This is more evident in girls' workbooks than in those of boys.
- The third line of enquiry assessed how effectively leaders have checked that additional funding is being used to enable disadvantaged pupils to achieve the higher standard in writing at key stage 2. The school has relatively few disadvantaged pupils compared to the national average. At the start of the inspection, the school website did not include the required detail of the impact of initiatives for those few pupils supported by the additional annual funding.
- Leaders have carried out an analysis of the impact of initiatives used in the previous year supported by the funding. They have also designed a suitable plan for the current year that shows spending plans and describes how they will assess the effectiveness of specific interventions. These details have been added to the school website.
- The final line of enquiry investigated what action leaders have taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Overall, rates of attendance at the school have been in line with the national average over time. However, in 2016, the rate of absence for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities rose to a level well above the national average. In the same year, the rate of absence of disadvantaged pupils was also above the national average, particularly for persistent absence.
- Leaders, including governors, regularly monitor the absence of individual pupils. They have worked with specific families and sought ways to overcome identified barriers to attendance. This has led to a noted improvement in the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and for disadvantaged pupils. The current attendance rates for these groups are improving but are still below the national average. Leaders acknowledge that improving attendance for these pupils remains a priority for the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers challenge pupils, especially boys, to reach the higher standard in writing in both key stages, including when writing in subjects across the curriculum
- parents receive sufficient detail of the school's curriculum so that they can support their children's learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Hodson  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, various school leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and the local authority adviser for schools. We visited classrooms to assess the progress being made by pupils. I looked at pupils' workbooks and talked with pupils in classes and at a separate meeting. I considered the school's information on the progress being made by current pupils.

We looked at a range of documentary evidence, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and plans for improvement. I looked at various documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record and governors' safeguarding reports. We assessed current rates of attendance for groups of pupils. I gathered views from parents at the school gate and took account of 66 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed several free-text responses from parents and results of the staff and pupil questionnaires.