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Mrs Louise Davies
St Monica's RC Primary School
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Dear Mrs Davies

Short inspection of St Monica's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide strong and effective leadership and have a clear vision for the continued success of this school. You and your senior leaders have steered the school successfully and have made the improvements identified in the last inspection. You have an accurate view of the school and regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning. School improvement plans are well focused.

St Monica's Primary School is a very welcoming, friendly and nurturing school where staff help pupils to develop well, both academically and personally. Pupils are happy to attend. Many said that they 'love their learning'. Pupils are cheerful and enthusiastic and show positive attitudes towards their school and each other. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are very positive about the school. One parent commented: 'St Monica's is a very special school that provides our children with a safe and loving environment to enrich their learning journey.' Another parent stated: 'This school is a wonderful school, providing an excellent all-round education and loving care for the children.'

You focus on nurturing the whole child. The school does this effectively through the strong school-parent relationships it has formed, the strong supportive relationships that adults have with pupils and the work in supporting vulnerable families. Staff said that they enjoy working at this school and that their well-being is important to you. They have confidence and trust in the leadership of this school.

Staff morale at this school is high. Senior and middle leaders work collaboratively to realise your vision for the school. You have developed leadership capacity at all levels. The culture that you have created empowers talented and committed leaders to make a real difference to the quality of teaching and learning.

Governors play a key role in supporting the work of the school. They are ambitious for the school to succeed. Governors speak passionately about the ethos of the school. They have attended a range of training and are knowledgeable and well equipped in a range of areas to support the school's work effectively. Leaders report that governors ask relevant and searching questions at meetings and hold them to account for the school's performance. Governing body minutes demonstrate this challenge. Their commitment was summed up by the chair of governors, who stated, 'It is not just a badge we wear.'

You, your senior leaders and governors have acted with determination to address areas of weakness. The last inspection report in September 2014 identified the need to ensure that the most able pupils reach the highest standards of which they are capable. Leaders have responded well and have taken action on this. There is now a new approach to the teaching of mathematics, placing a strong emphasis on problem-solving and reasoning. Staff are confident in addressing any misconceptions that pupils have and are skilled at deepening pupils' mathematical skills and understanding. As a result, outcomes in mathematics by the end of Year 6 have improved year-on-year.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Policies and procedures linked to safeguarding are up to date. Regular training and information-sharing ensure that teachers and governors understand their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe. Effective recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff.

Parents receive useful information on internet safety, which helps them to keep their children safe from harm online. Pupils spoke confidently about staying safe in the community, particularly around roads, and about what to do if approached by a stranger. They feel safe in school and know how to report concerns.

You understand the strong link between attendance and safeguarding. Overall, absence figures are broadly in line with national averages. However, persistent absence is still above the national average for disadvantaged pupils due to a small number of pupils with significant needs. You support your vulnerable families to attend school regularly through a range of strategies, including work with other agencies. Current school information indicates improved attendance for disadvantaged pupils. However, improving their attendance further remains a priority for school leaders.

Inspection findings

- At the last inspection, you were asked to develop the skills of less experienced senior leaders. You have, over time, grown and nurtured your senior leaders and they have become a strength of the school. They are highly reflective and continually seek ways to improve the learning journey of every child. They take a systematic approach to any development or change. Careful thought is given to the impact on pupils' outcomes. Leaders make regular checks to ensure that pupils benefit from the actions taken. As a result, the school continues to improve.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the progress of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding. In 2017, progress for these pupils at the end of key stage 2 was weaker than for other pupils nationally. You have ensured that leaders and teachers have a clearer focus on which pupils are in this group. Leaders carefully check on their progress, and they ensure that additional help is provided where it is needed. The school's information shows an overall improvement in the progress of disadvantaged pupils across the school. Progress for this group of pupils is now in line with the national average for other pupils at the end of key stage 2.
- Pupil Premium funding is used effectively to put into practice the school's vision for inclusion. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from a range of activities which enrich the school's curriculum and give all the pupils additional opportunities and experiences. These include trips, residential visits and learning to play a musical instrument. Staff also provide effective social and emotional support to enable disadvantaged pupils to develop their resilience and to further improve their skills in reading, writing and mathematics. You and your governors are committed to improving further the provision for disadvantaged pupils. You have commissioned an external pupil premium review to help you to achieve this.
- My third line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of the school's curriculum in enabling pupils to make good progress across a range of subjects. You have designed a curriculum to inspire pupils to learn. It deepens their knowledge, broadens their experience and gives them good life chances. These ambitions are being realised. You use your local community as a rich resource to ensure that learning is meaningful to the pupils. In my conversations with pupils during my visit, their enjoyment and engagement in the curriculum shone through. Pupils had been learning about pollution. They spoke keenly about issues such as the overuse of plastic and the damaging effect that this has on the environment.
- Subject leaders are passionate about developing their subject. They have developed their leadership roles through training and support. They regularly look at pupils' work, talk with pupils about their learning and provide information to governors about their subjects. Although much work has taken place, the role of the middle leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics is not fully developed. Some subject leaders are new to their role. The assessment of subjects other than English and mathematics has only recently been introduced and is not embedded.
- Next, I explored how well writing is taught across the school. I looked at the

quality of work in pupils' books in English and subjects in the wider curriculum. I saw evidence of some pupils making strong progress in their English books. However, I found variation in the quality of pupils' writing in science, geography and in history. In some classes, pupils have few opportunities to develop their writing skills in these subjects. Teachers' expectations regarding handwriting and presentation are too low.

- In the past year, you and your team have adjusted the way in which you teach reading. You have raised the importance of reading and have provided opportunities for pupils to read widely and often. Leaders have also established strategies to support pupils' understanding of the more complex reading skills such as inferring and deducing information from texts. As a result of this work, pupils show real enjoyment of reading. Outcomes in reading have further improved across key stages 1 and 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are increased opportunities for children to write at length across a range of subjects
- the consistency of presentation across the school is improved so that pupils produce work of a high standard
- the work of subject leaders is further developed so that it has a greater impact on teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Yours sincerely

Aleksandra Hartshorne
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met you, your senior leaders, governors and a group of teachers and teaching assistants. I spoke on the telephone with the school improvement adviser from the local authority. I also met with a group of your subject leaders, and together we looked at pupils' workbooks. You and I visited classrooms to assess the progress being made by pupils, and we talked with the pupils in lessons. I also had a discussion with a group of eight pupils from Years 3 to 6. I considered the school's information on the progress being made by current pupils.

I looked at a range of documentary evidence. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance, plans for improvement and minutes of governing body meetings. I looked at various documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record. I also reviewed the information available on the school's website.

I gathered views from parents and took account of 92 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I received 43 free-text responses from parents and reviewed the staff and pupils' questionnaires.