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Mr Cieran Flaherty  
Headteacher  
St Anthony's Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Mr Flaherty

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

Following my visit to the school on 15 January 2019, 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 March 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You and the deputy headteacher lead the school exceptionally well. Your passion and determination for all pupils to achieve their very best have continued to improve the school. You have the support of a creative and committed staff. Governors provide strong and strategic direction. Together, you have developed many aspects of the school since the last inspection.

The 'St Anthony's values' are at the heart of the school. The welcoming ethos and the warm and respectful relationships are part of the fabric. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement and for their personal and social development. As a result, pupils demonstrate a love of learning and show confidence and determination when they find things challenging. Pupils work together and support each other well. One pupil described the school's values as: 'We believe in giving everyone a chance and treating everyone as we want to be treated ourselves.'

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve teaching by teachers providing even greater challenge for the most able pupils. You have successfully achieved this. You have invested heavily in the ongoing professional development of staff. Staff have benefited from external training, working with local schools and internal coaching and mentoring programmes. They highly value the new technology that helps them to reflect on and continually improve their own teaching. Teachers have become confident in recognising and responding to pupils who are capable of working at higher standards. One teacher commented: 'We work as a team. We help each other. We try new things to make sure that we are encouraging and challenging the pupils to think hard and aim high.'

The percentage of pupils achieving the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined at the end of key stage 2 was above the national average in both 2017 and 2018. Progress rates in key stage 2 were above average in writing and mathematics.

There has been a steady year-on-year improvement in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception Year. There was a further improvement in 2018, but it is not yet in line with the national average. You have extended early years education to include two-year-olds and have recently appointed a new early years leader. She has a clear vision and is confidently leading improvement across the two- to four-year-old age range.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You are unwavering in your determination to follow through every concern. The Child and Family Support Worker has an excellent understanding of the issues facing the community. She has the trust and confidence of the community and offers extensive, effective support to families. The records and day-to-day notes reflect this.

Staff value the constant support, training and guidance that they receive for safeguarding. Their comments include: 'Everyone knows that keeping the children safe is the top priority. The child is at the centre of every decision and we pull together. It's like a family – we take care of each other.' The curriculum supports pupils to become more independent and to prepare them to be responsible citizens. They have a mature understanding about how to make good choices and to recognise and avoid risk.

Governors work closely with the school to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Effective systems are in place to carry out checks on different aspects of safeguarding, including online safety and staff recruitment. Through regular training, staff and governors have an up-to-date knowledge of procedures and understand the importance of being vigilant and identifying pupils' needs early.

## Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry for this inspection related to early years. I wanted to check whether children are making strong progress, particularly in communication, language and literacy skills.
- A high proportion of children begin Nursery with considerable weaknesses in skills communication, language and literacy and in managing feelings and behaviour. All staff take part in a programme of highly focused professional development to help them to respond to these challenges across the two- to four-year-old age range. As a result, teaching is highly responsive to children's needs.
- The early years leader has streamlined the approaches to planning and assessment. This has reduced unnecessary workload and made it easier to record information from all those involved with a child's learning, including parents and carers. She has introduced clear developmental maps of progression, for example in early mark-making, across the two- to four-year-old phase. This has highlighted the importance of mark-making as a step towards writing.
- Staff use these progression maps effectively to identify children's next steps in learning. Current children, particularly in Nursery, are making strong progress in forming letters correctly and recognising sounds that letters make. However, these new systems and approaches are not yet fully embedded. Improvement plans are precise and set ambitious, but realistic, targets to ensure that the proportion of children reaching and exceeding a good level of development continues to rise.
- I also wanted to check what leaders are doing to make sure that the most able pupils across the school are challenged in reading. Your commitment to this was very evident from the outset of my visit.
- All classrooms have high-quality children's literature on the shelves. Teachers are passionate about reading and highly skilled in teaching it. They use assessment information effectively to plan well-focused reading sessions. Pupils are articulate and able to explain their responses to challenging texts. Your records show that the proportion of pupils who are reading at greater depth is increasing in every year group.
- A final focus of this inspection was to evaluate the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning. The rich and stimulating curriculum is a strength of the school. Subject leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. They provide tailored support and guidance for staff where needed. Pupils achieve well, are confident and make strong progress across a wide range of subjects. Pupils talk eagerly about their learning in different subjects and topics. Pupils' comments include, 'There are so many brand-new things to learn every day here – like how to play new notes in music or how to mix primary colours in art.' This is typical of pupils' positive attitudes to the school and to their education.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new systems and approaches in early years teaching are fully embedded and that the proportion of children reaching and exceeding a good level of development continues to rise.

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

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I also met with a group of staff and the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body. I held telephone conversations with representatives from the local authority and the diocese. I visited all classes with you, where we observed teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work. I met with the early years leader and looked at work in children's learning journals. I spoke informally with pupils during the day.

I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and took account of six responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text responses. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and information about safeguarding.