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Mrs Bernadette Corbett
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Dear Mrs Corbett

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2011.

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.

As executive headteacher, you have ensured that St Mary's is a happy, friendly school where all pupils feel safe and welcome. Parents and carers say the school is like a family and their children love coming to school. This is reflected in pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils engage in lively, intelligent discussions about their work. Teachers skilfully address the needs of all pupils in mixed-age classes. This is a strength of the school. One parent's comment reflected the views of many: 'This is a great school. I can't fault it.'

As a result of your determined focus on pupils' achievement, outcomes have improved year on year and are exceptionally high. You and other leaders work closely as a leadership team to ensure that expectations are consistently high and ambitious targets are set. As a result, very high proportions of pupils achieved at the expected and the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. Outcomes have been improving over the past three years and attainment has been consistently well above the national average. For all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, progress by the end of key stage 2 in 2018

in reading, writing and mathematics was well above the national averages, particularly in reading and mathematics.

Pupils' well-being is a priority of the school and its values underpin a strong commitment to caring for and nurturing everyone. Pupils are respectful and kind at all times. They are sensitive to others' needs and recognise their responsibility to care for and look after others. They say that everybody is welcome here and everybody is treated equally. Pupils learn about different faiths and appreciate the differences between cultures. Pupils who recently visited the Birmingham Central Mosque described it as 'awesome'.

Pupils behave exceptionally well across the school. They say that bullying never happens, but, if it did, they know that adults would help them to sort it out quickly. Pupils develop independence and maturity by taking on positions of responsibility, such as school council representatives. Through this, they understand how democracy works. As 'Mini Vinnies', pupils raise funds for charity and support the local community, for example by hosting charity carol concerts in school for villagers at Christmas. As a result of these experiences, pupils learn about life in modern Britain and the contribution they can make to the community.

Governors have a wide range of skills and experience. They use these effectively in holding leaders to account. Members of the local governing board, who work closely with directors of the Painsley Catholic multi-academy company (MAC), are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and priorities for development. Together, they hold you and other leaders to account effectively. Governors value the information you provide about the performance of the school and the actions you are taking to improve outcomes further. Despite the recent move to the Painsley Catholic MAC, there are clear lines of accountability between senior leaders, the local governing board and the trust. This helps everyone understand very clearly their role in supporting and challenging the school to achieve even more impressive outcomes.

The predecessor school's last inspection took place in 2011. The areas for improvement identified at that point are no longer the focus of the current school development plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training on a wide range of safeguarding issues, including updates on statutory guidance. They are vigilant and tenacious in reporting and following up on their concerns. Where necessary, they escalate their concerns and challenge decisions if they believe a child is at risk.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed on three areas of focus:
 - Has the good standard of leadership and management been maintained and what has been the benefit to the school of joining the Painsley Catholic MAC?
 - In the light of the exceptional outcomes in recent years, have the good standards in the school been maintained for current cohorts of pupils?
 - Given mixed-age classes and strong outcomes, how well has the curriculum been adapted to suit the needs of all pupils?
- Since the last inspection in 2011, the school has undergone significant changes. It joined the Holy Trinity MAC in 2016. In September 2018, this school and other schools in the Holy Trinity MAC joined the Painsley Catholic MAC. Despite these changes and the need to embed new systems and procedures, St Mary's has retained its unique character as a small, rural school and is benefiting from the opportunities provided by the greater capacity of the schools in the MAC. Painsley College is a teaching school that offers expertise, support and training to other schools. St Mary's teachers work closely with colleagues from the other schools in the MAC to share good practice. St Mary's has much to gain from, but equally much to offer, this new partnership, for example sharing the strong practice that is evident here in relation to curriculum planning and mixed-age teaching.
- A large proportion of children enter the school with skills and abilities at or above those typical for their age. However, as a result of consistently high expectations, an even larger proportion left the Reception class in 2018 with skills typical for their age. Children in the early years make exceptional progress as a result of highly effective support. Staff quickly identify children's needs and design appropriate activities which support children's learning well.
- Pupils across the school make exceptional progress. Leaders check progress regularly to ensure that all pupils make strong progress, whatever their starting points.
- The quality of pupils' writing across the school is impressive. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and high expectations support pupils' learning very well. Pupils have many opportunities to write at length in a range of styles. In their discussions and in their writing, pupils use an extensive range of sophisticated vocabulary confidently.
- Many pupils write with fluency and flair. In most cases, this is supported by accurate use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. As a result, a high proportion of pupils achieve at the higher standard in writing by the end of key stage 2. However, even more pupils could achieve at the higher standard if their small errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar were eradicated.
- Pupils who read to me during the inspection did so with fluency and good intonation. There is an expectation that pupils will read every day. Their reading records show they move up through the levels of reading books regularly. However, for some older pupils, and particularly the most able, the books they had chosen lacked challenge.

- Mixed-age classes are a unique feature of the school, which presents a challenge for teachers in planning appropriate activities to address the needs of all pupils. At St Mary's, you have ensured that teachers have developed expertise in this aspect of their practice. Teachers use assessment information very effectively to identify and address the needs of individual pupils, designing carefully planned activities to appeal to pupils' interests.
- Pupils of different ages work well together in lessons, covering the same topics at different levels of challenge to reflect their different levels of development. The curriculum is well designed to facilitate this and to ensure that all pupils enjoy rich experiences as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. Each topic begins with a 'wow' week, where teachers plan exciting events to engage pupils' interest. For example, to start a recent topic, teachers set up a simulated car crash and pupils acted as accident investigators as part of their study of 'Wind in the Willows'.
- The curriculum is further adapted on 'Faith Fridays', when normal lessons are suspended and pupils work in mixed-age groups across the school on a project for a day. Younger pupils benefit from working with older pupils and older pupils benefit from taking on additional responsibilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new systems and procedures of the MAC are embedded, and the strong practice that exists in school is shared more widely with other schools in the MAC, particularly in relation to curriculum planning and mixed-age teaching
- pupils are more actively encouraged to read increasingly challenging texts
- even more pupils are supported effectively to achieve the higher standard in writing by the end of key stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Painsley Catholic MAC, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Before the inspection, I reviewed the school's published data and information on the school's website, including a number of policies.
- During the inspection, I met with you, the CEO of the Painsley MAC and other senior leaders to discuss the school development plan.
- I met with the chair of the board of trustees and a representative of the local governing board.
- Together, we visited lessons across the school. During lessons, I looked at work in pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning.
- I listened to a number of pupils read.
- I talked to parents at the start of the day and took account of the 46 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, along with 43 free-text responses.
- I also reviewed the 13 responses to the staff survey and the 28 responses to the pupil survey.
- I spoke to pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and in lessons about how they learn to stay safe and their enjoyment of school.
- I met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss issues about safeguarding and checked the school's record of recruitment checks.
- I analysed a selection of leaders' monitoring records and minutes of governing body meetings.