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Dear Ms Gibbs

Short inspection of St Modwen'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 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. Over the past four years, there have been significant changes in leadership and teaching staff. The school has grown in size and is now two-form entry throughout. You and the governors have managed these changes successfully and have ensured that pupils have continued to achieve well.

You and the staff have created a bright and engaging learning environment for pupils and staff. The school's motto of 'Together we Believe, Achieve, Care' is evident in all aspects of the school's work. Pupils benefit from a caring and dedicated staff team that knows them well. They are keen to learn and show high levels of respect for each other and adults. This was captured by one pupil who said, 'You should respect everyone no matter what religion they are or what they look like.'

Pupils listen carefully in lessons and apply themselves productively to tasks. They take pride in their work and present it well. Pupils value being able to contribute to decisions that affect them. They proudly describe how the school council works to make the school better and to help others, for example by designing the peace garden, raising money for charity and interviewing new teachers.

You have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Staff have received training in how to develop pupils' thinking skills. In lessons, teachers ask highly effective questions to probe pupils' understanding and deepen their learning. Activities mostly match pupils' abilities closely, which

supports them to make good progress. However, occasionally, activities are not sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils. Teachers provide pupils with purposeful feedback and encourage them to act on it to edit and improve their work. This helps pupils to develop their writing and mathematics skills, for example the use of capital letters and full stops.

You have worked hard to build positive relationships with parents. Parents visit school regularly to take part in curriculum workshops and 'meet the teacher' events. There are opportunities for parents to celebrate their children's work in half-termly assemblies. Newsletters and the school's social media account provide parents with information about school events. Parents are extremely positive about the school. Those who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, say that their children are happy, well taught and make good progress. Almost all of them say that leaders respond well to any concerns they raise.

Leaders routinely monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes by observing lessons, looking at pupils' work and meeting with teachers to discuss pupils' progress. As a result, they know what the school does well and what needs to improve further. However, targets in improvement plans do not consistently reflect this because they are too broad.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school. They possess the necessary skills and expertise to support and challenge you and other leaders. Governors meet regularly with different leaders to discuss the actions they are taking to improve the school further. However, because leaders' plans do not contain clear milestones and measurable success criteria, it is difficult for governors to evaluate how effective leaders' actions are in improving teaching and pupils' outcomes during the year.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff know pupils and their families well and keep a watchful eye on vulnerable pupils. They follow the school's procedures for reporting concerns. Leaders act on these appropriately, including making referrals to external agencies when needed. Recent training has developed staff's understanding of a range of safeguarding topics relevant to the local community, including Prevent and county lines. Leaders complete the necessary checks to ensure that all adults in the school are suitable to work with children.

Pupils feel safe at school. They say that bullying does not happen at St Modwen's, and they know what to do should it occur. Pupils shared with me how they learn to stay safe outside of school, for example through e-safety assemblies, learning to swim and taking part in 'bikeability'. The parents who responded to Parent View agree that their children are safe and well looked after at school.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to look at how well teaching meets the needs and interests of boys to enable them to make good progress in reading and writing. For the past two years, boys have achieved less well than girls in reading and writing at the end of early years and key stage 1. In key stage 2, boys' progress in writing has also been below that of girls.
- In the early years, leaders have identified that many boys start school with skills in reading and writing that are below those typical for their age. Adults know individual children well and provide them with the support they need to catch up. Work in books shows that adults develop boys' reading and writing skills carefully over time. Phonics teaching is effective and children, including boys, make strong progress in using their phonics skills to read and spell. Adults plan purposeful opportunities for children to read and write across many areas of learning, and in the indoor and outdoor learning environments. This has been particularly successful in motivating boys to write more frequently. The school's assessment information shows that boys are making progress that is in line with girls in reading. In writing, boys have made strong progress since the start of the year, and a similar proportion of boys and girls are now working within the expectations for their age.
- Leaders have purchased new reading materials for pupils in key stages 1 and 2. They have selected books carefully that will interest boys and encourage them to read. Reading books match boys' needs and interests closely, which means that they read regularly at home as well as at school. Boys spoken to during the inspection were enthusiastic about reading. They were able to talk about favourite authors and read aloud with fluency, accuracy and understanding.
- Teachers plan purposeful writing activities that motivate pupils to write. They use a range of teaching strategies, including multi-media, to capture pupils' imagination and give them interesting topics to write about. Teachers choose topics so that there is a balance of themes that appeal to the interests of boys and girls. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 1 wrote about trams, which particularly interested the boys.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and teach the technical aspects of writing well. As a result, pupils make good progress in the development of their writing skills. They make effective use of descriptive vocabulary and write in sentences of increasing complexity. However, although teachers address errors in pupils' spelling and punctuation, boys make less progress in these aspects of their writing than they do in others. The school's assessment information shows that the proportion of boys working at the standard expected for their age in reading and writing continues to be smaller than girls in almost all classes.
- My second line of enquiry was to explore how effectively the wider curriculum meets pupils' needs and enables them to make strong progress in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Leaders have designed a vibrant curriculum that engages pupils. Pupils have rich opportunities to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills across a broad range of subjects, including science, the humanities, art, music, physical

education and the performing arts. Leaders deploy specialist teachers skilfully to ensure that pupils receive high-quality learning experiences. The curriculum promotes pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well. Pupils learn to think about others who are less fortunate than themselves. For example, the 'Caritas ambassadors' lead assemblies and organise fundraising events. This helps pupils to deepen their understanding of world issues. Leaders develop pupils' social skills, for example, through nurture groups.

- Teachers plan lessons that build effectively on pupils' prior learning. They ask questions that encourage pupils to explain their thinking and deepen their understanding. Pupils have lots of opportunities to discuss their learning. For example, during the inspection pupils in Year 2 confidently shared their observations about the growth of seeds and Year 6 pupils engaged in high-quality debate as part of their learning in religious education. Pupils make confident use of subject-specific vocabulary because teachers use this routinely in their teaching. They develop strong skills in subjects such as science, music and art. However, work in books shows that the development of pupils' subject-specific skills in history and geography is less strong.
- My third key line of enquiry was to investigate how effective leaders' actions have been in reducing rates of absence and persistent absence, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders understand the complex reasons for some pupils' low attendance. They work effectively to support families so that pupils attend school regularly and on time. Leaders make close checks on pupils' attendance and follow up any absence swiftly to identify the reasons and to ensure that pupils are safe. They use a range of rewards to celebrate good attendance, for example pupils get to look after 'Modwen the swan' and receive termly certificates for 100% attendance. Leaders challenge unacceptable absence through warning letters and meetings with parents to discuss attendance. As a result, the school's information shows that overall absence and persistent absence reduced to be in line with national averages in 2018. The attendance of boys and disadvantaged pupils also improved.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- targets for improvement are more precise, and plans contain measurable success criteria and milestones so that leaders and governors can check the impact of their actions more effectively during the year
- boys' attainment and progress in reading and writing continues to improve so that they achieve at least as well as girls
- pupils have more opportunities to develop their subject-specific skills in history and geography.

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 Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher and other leaders. I met with three members of the governing body. I also spoke to a representative from the diocese and a representative from the local authority. I observed pupils learning in parts of 14 lessons, jointly with senior leaders. I looked at pupils' work in a range of books in lessons along with senior leaders. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils in lessons. I also listened to a group of pupils read. I examined school documentation, including information relating to current pupils' attainment and progress in reading and writing, the school development plan and your evaluation of the school's performance. I also scrutinised a range of safeguarding documents. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took into account the 43 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I considered the 31 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.