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Mrs S Milligan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Milligan

### **Short inspection of St Herbert's RC School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 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 June 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a school with a strong feeling of family and community. Staff, pupils and parents are proud to be part of the school. Many parents and some staff attended the school as pupils and were keen that their children attended. There are a range of opportunities for pupils to care for others, for example, the 'Foodbank Friday' initiative, which is supporting a local foodbank.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and use this to ensure that their shared commitment to provide the best for every child is effective. Staff have access to high-quality training and this is improving the quality of teaching across the school. As a result, the school is used as an example of good practice within the local authority for the teaching of phonics.

Leaders regularly evaluate pupils' progress and provide additional targeted support for pupils if their progress falls behind. Pupils that I spoke to were keen to tell me that they valued this support as it enabled them 'to catch up and have time to get things right'.

There has been considerable investment made in the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff support pupils with SEND highly effectively, through activities in the 'Hub' and within the sensory room. In these creative and well-planned provisions, pupils thrive.

Pupils behave well in class and around school. They are caring towards each other, curious and have well-developed, positive attitudes to learning. The pupils I spoke with said that they 'enjoy learning because teachers make it fun'. Consequently, pupils' attendance is higher than the national average, which reflects how much they enjoy their time at school. However, pupils who spoke to me were keen to say that they wanted to learn more about all forms of equality so that they could have a greater understanding of people who are different from them. Leaders agreed that, as part of the current development of the school's curriculum, this would be addressed.

The previous inspection report identified the need to improve the quality of the teaching of mathematics, so that the most able pupils are challenged. I decided to look at this in more detail as part of the inspection. You were also asked to improve leadership and management, so that all leaders could accurately plan for improvements, with clear goals so that success can be checked and measured. This has been successfully addressed and your actions have been instrumental in supporting the improvements that leaders have made across the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture around keeping children safe throughout the school. Leaders keep detailed records of issues affecting individual pupils. They are also aware of any safeguarding concerns within the local community. Staff and governors receive a wide range of comprehensive training. Consequently, they all have a good understanding of their responsibility to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. Appropriate checks are made on staff and visitors.

Pupils, staff and parents believe that pupils are safe. Pupils I spoke with said that they feel safe and they appreciated the many ways that teachers support them. The curriculum ensures that there are many opportunities for pupils to learn about staying safe, for example when cycling on the roads or working online.

### **Inspection findings**

- As part of this inspection, I focused on several lines of enquiry. We looked at the teaching of reading and mathematics within the early years. This was because outcomes in reading and mathematics were not as strong as they had been in 2017 and 2018. Leaders have invested heavily in improving provision within the early years since the last inspection. Children learn in a vibrant and skilfully planned learning environment. Adult and child-initiated activities help develop and promote children's basic reading and mathematical skills. Activities that children choose themselves are planned and resourced well enough to ensure that children make progress when they are working independently.
- Current achievement in the early years shows that children are now making stronger progress in mathematics than they have previously. However, progress in reading is less positive and does not match the strong achievement in phonics. Leaders have identified this and are determined to improve this further.

- The teaching of phonics is a strength within the early years and ensures that children make a good start in developing their literacy skills. The systematic approach adopted helps the children to master early reading skills. This also ensures that they are well prepared for Year 1.
- My next line of enquiry concerned the rates of progress for pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding. Leaders have identified the barriers to pupils making good progress. For example, they know that many children have difficulties with language and communication in the early years, while for older pupils social and emotional factors have a key impact. Additional staff have been employed to facilitate smaller classes, provide individually taught lessons and teach small nurture groups. Leaders use the funding creatively and ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. Across the school, achievement in 2018 improved for disadvantaged pupils, especially for the most able.
- Another area that I explored was the improving achievement in key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. I wanted to see if the high standards reached in 2018 were being sustained. Leaders regularly evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. They use this information to ensure that teachers have access to, and benefit from, targeted training. Leaders and staff assess pupils' progress and use this information to plan relevant learning activities and provide additional support when necessary. Tasks are set at the appropriate level to challenge pupils, especially the most able. Pupils are given precise guidance from teachers, so that they can improve their work. They were able to tell me how they use this information to improve their learning. As a result of improvements made, the progress that Year 6 pupils made in reading and mathematics by the time they left the school in 2018 was in the top 20% of schools nationally and outcomes were strong. Pupils' outcomes in writing by the end of Year 6 were also strong. Evidence suggests that current pupils continue to perform well.
- Leaders have reviewed and reflected on the teaching of reading. Consequently, new strategies have been introduced to improve the quality of pupils' skills in this area. For example, pupils now have more opportunities to practise specific reading skills, such as comprehension and inference. Current school information shows that pupils' progress in reading continues to improve.
- I also explored how effectively leaders ensure that more pupils achieve at the expected and higher standards in mathematics. There is now an established whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematics. From our visits to mathematics lessons, it was clear that teachers encourage pupils to explain their thinking in depth when solving problems. Evidence in pupils' books and records of pupils' progress show that more pupils are being challenged to reach the higher standards by the end of Year 6. The teaching of mathematics is now a strength of the school.
- In 2018, Year 6 pupils' achievement in spelling, punctuation and grammar showed a clear improvement on previous years. Their increased understanding is having a positive impact on aspects of pupils' writing. However, despite outcomes improving in writing, leaders are keen that pupils' progress in writing continues to improve further so that it is as strong as it is in mathematics and reading.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers develop further pupils' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity so that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain
- a greater proportion of children in the Reception Year achieve the early learning goal in reading
- the new approaches to the teaching of writing continue to be embedded so that pupils make even stronger progress across key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Barlow  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I observed teaching and learning and scrutinised examples of pupils' work. I met with you, other senior leaders and the learning mentor. I spoke with six pupils in key stage 2 and with pupils informally in lessons and around the school. I also spoke with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and with a representative of the local authority.

I evaluated the 44 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and took account of the 44 free-text responses from parents. I also took account of 25 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 53 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's self-evaluation; the school's development plans and assessment records; minutes of the governing body meetings; safeguarding documentation; and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. I also considered information posted on the school's website.