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Mrs Marian Ryder
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ryder

Short inspection of St Clare's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 June 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 October 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have worked hard with your colleagues to create a school where pupils thrive and are happy. Staff and governors are extremely proud to belong to the school, which is a tribute to the very positive relationships that you have established. It is clear that you are all highly committed, and that morale is high. In this very inclusive learning environment, the school's four values of 'faith, honesty, perseverance and respect' permeate all aspects of the school's work.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive and value what they referred to as the 'family ethos' and 'safe atmosphere' where children 'have fun and work hard'. The majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, enthused about the school and your leadership.

Pupils also spoke very highly of St Clare's Primary School. They know that staff 'really care' about them and make sure that there are 'lots of exciting things to do'. Pupils appreciate the wide variety of extra-curricular activities on offer, as well as the trips and visitors to school that are organised to enrich their learning. Pupils' behaviour in and around school is exemplary. They are polite and courteous to each other, staff and visitors.

An area for improvement at the last inspection was to increase the opportunities for pupils to practise applying their mathematical skills. This has been addressed successfully. For the last two years, pupils made progress similar to the top 20% of all pupils nationally by

the end of Year 6. Attainment has also been above average. The mathematics leader works collaboratively with other schools in the North West to provide strong leadership. Additional training has supported staff to help pupils to develop a deeper understanding of mathematics, so that they can use their knowledge and skills fluently. Work in pupils' books and the school's own assessments confirm that pupils continue to make good progress in mathematics.

Leaders regularly monitor pupils' work to make sure that the school's policy for feedback to pupils is being consistently applied. You introduced a uniform approach to the teaching of phonics, which has improved pupils' spelling. Pupils continue to practise spelling patterns using a personalised spelling book to help them to identify troublesome words. This resource has been particularly effective in key stage 1, where pupils are making strong progress in writing.

Governors are well informed and have a clear overview of the school's effectiveness. They bring a range of professional skills to support the leadership of the school. You provide them with accessible information about the progress that pupils make. Governors confirm this information through their regular visits to the school and through meetings with subject leaders. In addition, governors talk to pupils and parents regularly and seek their views through questionnaires. Consequently, governors are able to fully hold you and other leaders to account for your work.

The school's website is not fully compliant with statutory requirements. For example, it does not give clear information about what is taught in each subject and year group or the impact of pupil premium funding. Difficulties with the administration of the website have hampered the school's ability to keep it up to date. Governors have already taken action to make sure that these issues are resolved, including recruiting a governor with expertise in this area.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are carried out on all staff prior to them taking up posts at the school. Staff training is up to date. There are well-established systems in place to keep pupils safe.

Pupils are confident that adults in school will help them if they have a problem and that they will deal with it quickly. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum and also to take responsibility for the safety of each other. For example, older pupils are appointed as 'junior safety officers', leading assemblies on issues such as playground and road safety. Pupils are well versed in keeping safe online. They know how to recognise and respond to different types of bullying, although they said that this is very rare. Pupils are well prepared to deal with any incidents that might occur.

Records viewed on inspection showed that where pupils are potentially vulnerable, swift action is taken to protect them. The appointment of a family support worker has further strengthened relationships with parents. This enables the school to offer early help to vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- A focus for the inspection was to review why pupils' achievement in reading and writing lagged behind that in mathematics. Although rates of progress were similar to all schools nationally in 2018, pupils' attainment in reading, and especially in writing, was weaker. You explained that the school has expanded recently. Some pupils have arrived outside the normal admissions cycle, and are often newly arrived in the country. This means that they have had less time to benefit from the effective support that the school offers.
- Your own evaluations found that for some pupils, progress in reading was hampered because their early language skills were not well developed. You have made changes to strengthen the progress of all pupils. This includes more help for younger pupils. This will enable them to gain a good understanding of phonics and improve their reading comprehension skills. Staff training, additional adult support and new resources have also had a positive effect. Pupils enjoy reading and are encouraged to read frequently. There are ample opportunities for pupils to explore a wide range of different texts and authors. Inspection evidence and the school's own information confirmed that across all key stages, pupils make good progress in their reading.
- You have improved the teaching of writing through staff training and coaching. There are examples of excellent work in some classes. This is apparent when teachers have high expectations of pupils, modelling good writing using high-quality texts. In Year 2, for example, teachers encourage pupils to be more adventurous in the use of adjectives in their writing. These skills become more sophisticated as pupils move through the school. Pupils are encouraged to write for a purpose. They are provided with useful tools in the classroom to help them to check their work. Pupils' work is celebrated in the vibrant displays around the school. However, the high standards seen in most English books are not consistently evident across all classes and in other subjects. For example, some pupils do not take the same pride in their topic books, where handwriting, spelling and punctuation are weaker. In some classes, teachers' expectations of writing across subjects are lower than for pupils' work in English.
- The second focus was to look at whether most-able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make enough progress in reading and writing in key stage 2. In 2018, few pupils reached the higher standard in reading or greater depth in writing. The progress of all pupils is carefully monitored by staff and leaders. There is a swift response to help pupils who are not making enough progress or have gaps in their learning. For example, pupils have extra time with teaching assistants. The work to remove barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils is a credit to the effective leadership and teaching in the school. An example of this is the additional work to promote pupils' emotional well-being and confidence. These actions are having a positive impact, with increasing numbers of pupils reaching the higher standard, especially in reading.
- The third focus for the inspection was to check whether children in early years make good progress from their starting points. Children's development, especially that of boys, has been below average for the last two years at the end of Reception. Children's attainment on entry to school is low. Approximately half of the children arrive needing a lot of extra support to develop their social and language skills. Children quickly make progress in the nurturing environment. This is because expectations are high and the

children enjoy learning and feel safe. Adults make sure that activities are designed to enthuse children, especially boys, and enable them to become more resilient. For example, children practise the letters and sounds that they have learned and use these to write short sentences in their English books. They are becoming increasingly confident and accurate with their writing. Children develop independence when using the hall for games, as they sensibly collect equipment and store it neatly without adult support. The school establishes strong relationships with parents. They are encouraged to be involved so that learning can continue at home. There are also close links with pre-school providers, to make sure that children are well prepared for school. These initiatives are having a positive impact on children's outcomes. The achievement gap between boys and girls is narrowing. As a result, children make strong progress by the end of Reception and are ready for the challenges of Year 1.

- Next, I wanted to find out whether there are enough opportunities for pupils to make progress in a range of curriculum subjects. At the last inspection, you were asked to extend the skills of middle leaders to improve teaching across the curriculum. Information on the school's website about the curriculum was limited. You have done a significant amount of work to make sure that subject leaders receive appropriate training and take greater responsibility. For example, middle leaders are given the time to monitor their subject areas. They report back to governors about the progress that they are making to implement their plans. Leaders are rightly proud of the rich variety of experiences that promote pupils' academic, personal and social skills well. This includes, for example, working with local theatre groups and a local zoo. The excellent quality of displays around the school and in books demonstrates success in many areas of the curriculum, including in mathematics, art and religious education. However, some of the recent actions are not fully embedded, which means that teaching is not consistent and some subjects are not taught in sufficient depth. These include history, geography and modern foreign languages.
- Finally, I investigated why the school's attendance rates are lower than average and more pupils are likely to be persistently absent, especially disadvantaged pupils. The school's decision to focus on improving attendance in 2018 was a sound one. With the newly appointed family support worker, you have introduced a series of measures to help parents and pupils to recognise the importance of good attendance. With you, she has worked very hard to improve relationships with parents, including being a visible presence on the playground each day. Good attendance is rewarded. It is promoted prominently around the school and through the newsletter. Parents and staff receive information about the attendance of individual pupils. Support is put in place for pupils whose attendance dips. These measures are working. At the time of the inspection, attendance was similar to the national averages. The number of persistent absences has also been significantly reduced.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they capitalise on the high standards of writing seen in some classes, so that all pupils continue to improve their writing skills and apply them across other subjects
- pupils develop knowledge and skills in sufficient depth across the curriculum, including

in history, geography and modern foreign languages, to prepare them well for the next stage of their education

- they improve the systems for checking that information on the school's website fully meets requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Parkinson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with the deputy headteacher and had telephone conversations with you. I met subject leaders and the school business manager. I met with members of the governing body, including the chair. I spoke to a representative from the local authority on the telephone. I visited several classes with the deputy headteacher to observe teaching and learning. Together with some teachers, I looked at pupils' work.

I met with a group of pupils from across the school. I took account of the 31 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and evaluated 32 free-text responses from parents. I considered the 12 responses from pupils to the Ofsted online questionnaire and also reviewed staff and pupil questionnaires issued by the school.

I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and the school development plan. I viewed a range of information about pupils' attainment and progress. I scrutinised the safeguarding document and I undertook a review of the school's website.