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Ms Mary Garvey
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Garvey

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 September 2018, 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 2013.

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 provided the school with strong leadership in the two years since taking up your post. The improvements that you have made to the learning environment, systems and procedures mean that the school is in a stronger position now than it was at the time of the last inspection. You are rightly proud of the school's many strengths, but understand the importance of sustaining these. You also have a sharp focus on addressing the small number of areas that still require further improvement.

Senior and middle leaders work collaboratively to realise your clear vision for the school. You have developed leadership capacity at all levels. The culture that you have created empowers talented and committed leaders to make a real difference to the quality of teaching and learning.

You have raised expectations of what pupils can achieve at St Mary's and are to be commended on how you have taken the whole school community with you. Staff feel very well supported. The responses to the staff online questionnaire were extremely positive. Teachers appreciate how much you consider their work-life balance. For example, you do not ask them to perform unnecessary tasks and you ensure that new procedures are implemented within a manageable timeline. The

collaborative way that teachers plan learning not only benefits their workload, but also ensures that there are consistent standards across the school.

Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school. They value the kindness of their teachers and other staff. They particularly appreciate the help that they receive if they are struggling in any way. Without any doubt, staff at this school care deeply for every pupil. This is particularly the case for those pupils who are vulnerable. This nurturing environment enables pupils to thrive and achieve well.

Pupils at St Mary's benefit from a rich and varied curriculum, including a range of enrichment activities. For example, all pupils in Year 4 learn a brass instrument and perform at The Bridgewater Hall. The very inclusive school choir also performs at this prestigious music venue.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Many of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire spoke of how happy their children are and how much they love coming to school. They value how friendly and approachable the staff are and the family ethos of the school. Parents appreciate the balance that you have achieved at the school between caring for their children and ensuring that they achieve well. As one parent commented, 'I could not be happier with St Mary's and the way that my daughter's educational and emotional well-being is nurtured.'

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to make sure that the most able pupils were being challenged enough. Ensuring that the most able pupils make good progress and attain high standards has been a high priority for you in the last two years. The actions that you have taken have had a positive impact, particularly in mathematics. Making sure that all pupils, particularly the most able, make good progress in reading, however, remains an ongoing priority for you.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong safeguarding culture permeates the whole school. While this has always been the case, one of your first priorities after taking up your post was to hone the protocols and procedures relating to all aspects of safeguarding. This means that very strong systems underpin the culture that puts children's safety and well-being at the heart of the school.

You understand the strong link between attendance and safeguarding. To this end, you appointed an attendance and family liaison officer. Her work with pupils and their families has led to improved attendance, particularly of disadvantaged pupils. Absence figures are broadly in line with national averages, but improving pupils' attendance and punctuality remains a priority for leaders.

You ensure that all staff have appropriate, up-to-date training so that they are confident both about noticing any signs of potential abuse or neglect and the correct procedure to follow should that be the case. Vulnerable pupils are particularly well cared for at your school. The well-being of all pupils is a high priority. One staff member is a trained counsellor. You are also part of a scheme

organised by the diocese that provides a social worker to support your work with pupils.

Systems to ensure that only suitable people are recruited to work with children in the school are secure and monitored monthly.

Inspection findings

- In recent years, pupils' rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics have been at or above national averages. However, the most able pupils have not made consistently good progress. This was particularly the case in mathematics and reading in 2017. In addition, the proportion of pupils attaining the high standard in these areas was noticeably lower than the national average in 2017. Consequently, I was interested to find out what actions leaders have taken to ensure that the most able pupils make the best possible progress and attain well in these areas. The early release of the unvalidated 2018 key stage 2 national performance data shows that leaders' actions in mathematics have had a significant impact. The most able pupils have made much better progress and a much higher proportion have attained the higher standard. While a higher proportion also attained the higher standard in reading, the most able pupils still did not make good enough progress in this area.
- During the inspection, you were able to explain very clearly how you have brought about these improvements and the reasons for the different levels of success in mathematics and reading. Last year, all teachers had a performance management target related to the most able pupils in mathematics. This reflected the high profile of this area across the school. The highly skilled leader for mathematics delivered ongoing training to staff, focusing on challenge and application skills. You also made sure that this leader had the time to work with staff to support their subject knowledge. You identified pupils to attend pre-teaching sessions before the start of the school day. Meticulous tracking of pupils' progress in mathematics ensured that you could evaluate the impact of your actions throughout the year. Mathematics has been a strength of the school for some time, but the strategic focus on this subject throughout last year has taken this subject to the next level. Consequently, pupils' performance in mathematics in 2018 was very impressive.
- Improving pupils' progress in reading, particularly for the most able, was your other main priority last year. While you had some success in this area, it was not as significant as in mathematics and this is now your top priority for this year. Your approach to improving reading focuses on building pupils' vocabulary. Rightly, this is a long-term strategy rather than a superficial 'quick fix'. The 'grow your vocabulary' strategy is evident throughout the school and is a fundamental part of pupils' learning. Pupils develop their vocabulary and, importantly, embed and apply this new knowledge and understanding in their learning. The literacy leader has used her strong subject knowledge to train teachers and model high-quality teaching in this area. You are providing ongoing training for teachers to improve their confidence in teaching comprehension skills. A system is in place to

track precisely pupils' progress in reading and to evaluate the effectiveness of your actions throughout the year.

- During the inspection, I was keen to investigate the quality of the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics. I was extremely impressed with the work that you are doing in this area. Leaders believe that the quality of the curriculum in each subject area is very much the driver of the overall progress that pupils make. As you state, 'If we get the curriculum right, the results will follow.' Leaders' thinking on the curriculum is informed by research, particularly related to the importance of pupils' ability to make links in their learning. Developing pupils' knowledge is fundamental and this has informed a new way of teaching and learning. The use of 'knowledge organisers' has been introduced, initially in humanities. A scrutiny of books from last year showed how pupils were using these to make connections in their learning. The quality of work in humanities across all year groups is of a very high standard. This method of teaching and learning is being rolled out in science and religious education this year.
- Some of the policies on the school website led to a line of enquiry focused on whether leaders promote all forms of equality. I was particularly keen to find out whether leaders fostered greater understanding and respect for all groups with protected characteristics, as defined in the Equality Act 2010. You were quick to point out that the relevant policies on the website were out of date. Over the last two years, you have been reviewing and updating all school policies, but this has not yet happened for those relating to equalities and sex and relationships education. You explained how the culture in the school and the curriculum promote respect for all individuals and groups. For example, pupils are taught about different types of families and loving relationships. You are keen to develop the school's work further in this area. To this end, you and your deputy are attending some diversity training later this term, which you will then roll out to all staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the improvements already made in reading so that all pupils, and particularly the most able, make the best possible progress.

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

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I also met with the assistant headteacher and two middle leaders, the attendance and family liaison officer, three members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative of the local authority. I met formally with two groups of pupils and talked informally with others in lessons and during morning break. I listened to a small number of pupils read. I also talked with parents informally at the start of the school day. Accompanied by you, I observed teaching and learning across the school. Together with you, the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, I scrutinised the literacy and humanities work of a group of pupils. I examined your self-evaluation document and improvement plans. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered the 16 free-text comments sent by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also considered the 30 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.