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Mr Michael Aldred
Headteacher
St Margaret Mary RC Junior and Infant School
Perry Common Road
Birmingham
West Midlands
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Dear Mr Aldred

Short inspection of St Margaret Mary RC Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 21 January 2016, 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 2010.

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 set a clear vision to drive the school forward that is shared and understood by your leadership team and staff. You set high expectations and make sure that the school is a calm and purposeful environment in which most pupils do well socially and academically. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and appreciative of your, and the staff's, hard work and commitment. The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report have been tackled successfully. Work continues on areas you have identified such as closing the achievement gap between boys and girls. You have introduced a new assessment system that is enabling teachers to identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding more precisely. You and your leadership team use this information to address the gaps in pupils' learning through appropriate intervention and support. As a result, the achievement gaps between boys and girls, and between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally, are beginning to close.

Since the last inspection, you have successfully opened a nursery provision. Currently there are 26 children receiving morning-only education. You have correctly identified that this provision is helping to raise standards in Reception Year. The number of pupils at the school is increasing, demonstrating the school's popularity and good reputation in the local community and beyond.

The well-being of pupils is central to your vision and a strength of the school. Your aim that pupils 'live, love and learn' together is reinforced by your colleagues' determination to provide pupils with highly effective care, guidance and support.

Governors wholeheartedly support you and the school and are keen for pupils to do well. However, while they have a clear understanding of the school's many strengths, they are less clear about what the school needs to do to improve further. In addition, they have not made sure that all the school's statutory policies and procedures meet current government guidelines.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established systems and practices that make sure pupils feel safe and are safe in school. All of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree.

All staff receive appropriate and relevant training and guidance so that they know how to keep pupils safe. A number of leaders and governors have completed safer recruitment training. As a result, the checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough. You demonstrate tenacity in following up on pupils who are absent from school. You work effectively with the local authority's Children Missing in Education Team where children have been absent without good reason. As a result, pupils' attendance, particularly of those with an education, health and care plan, is improving.

Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying. The vast majority of pupils who spoke with me said that all staff deal with bullying incidents quickly and effectively. Pupils know how to avoid risks. This is because they have gained guidance in lessons, assemblies and from visiting speakers. The school's work on preventing radicalisation and extremism with pupils is in its infancy. As a result, a few pupils are unaware of how political and religious groups or individuals might try to entice them to be unlawful or antisocial.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have sustained and developed the good standards of learning at the school. You have a clear view of what the school does well and what needs to be done to improve further. You acknowledge that there have been some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. For example, you recognise that not all teachers consistently use the school's marking and assessment policy in order to improve pupils' knowledge, understanding, learning and progress. In addition, you are conscious of the need to improve pupils' depth of mathematical understanding and their ability to problem solve and use their mathematical skills confidently. You and school leaders are determined to eradicate these inconsistencies. As a result, you have put in place appropriate procedures to support underperforming pupils and staff. Some staff who did not rise to this challenge have left the school.

- The school's leaders are aware that pupils who are disadvantaged do not do as well as other pupils in the school or nationally. You and the leadership team monitor the progress of all pupils but pay particular attention to this group. You have put in place a range of strategies to close the achievement and learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. These approaches are having success in some year groups, for example in Year 1. You are aware, however, that the interventions are yet to have a sustained impact, for example in Year 3.
- You are aware that boys do not do as well as girls throughout the school. You have tackled this issue and information provided by the school shows that boys currently in the school are doing as well as girls in the majority of classes. You are aware, however, that in Year 3 and Year 5 girls still do better than boys, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- You have forged positive and effective links with parents. They value your, and your staff's, hard work and dedication in ensuring that their children do well socially and academically. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that they particularly appreciate your willingness to talk to them about their children's progress.
- Staff morale is high at the school and there is a palpable sense of, as one member of staff said, 'We're all in this together'. This results in positive relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff. All members of the school community really do 'live, love and learn' together.
- Governors are committed to the pupils and families of the school. They have supported you in making sure the school continues to move forward, for example by introducing nursery provision. However, not all governors fully understand the information you provide about pupils' current progress. In addition, they have not made sure that all the school's policies reflect current government guidance and the good practice in the school.
- Provision for children in the early years is strong and well led. The delivery of well-organised activities ensures children do well in most areas of learning, particularly in communication and language, writing and mathematics. The early years leader correctly identifies the need to improve children's reading across other subjects and activities, such as reading instructions when learning through play. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been at least broadly in line with the national figure and more recently above it. The recently introduced nursery provision has made a difference to raising standards in the Reception Year.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a strength of the school. Behaviour and conduct in lessons and at other times in the school day is very good. This is because staff set high expectations and model appropriate behaviour and social skills, such as listening attentively.
- Pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 are well prepared for secondary school. You and your staff have focused on raising standards in Key Stage 1. As a result, pupils coming to the end of this key stage are better prepared for Key Stage 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should make sure that:

- assessment and feedback in lessons and in pupils' books is in line with the school's own policy and helps pupils to improve their knowledge, understanding, learning and progress
- governors develop their understanding of the school's information about pupils' progress so that they can provide sharper, more incisive challenge to you and other school leaders
- all statutory policies and procedures follow current guidelines and reflect the school's effective practice
- all teachers extend pupils' mathematical understanding, ability to reason and problem solve so that their skills can be used confidently
- children in the early years are able to use their reading skills in a range of learning activities
- all pupils are aware of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation and know how to resist the enticement to be unlawful or antisocial
- the learning and achievement gap between boys and girls and between pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils in school and nationally continues to close.

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 Birmingham City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection you gave me a tour of the premises and I met with you, your leadership team and other staff to discuss the work of the school. I observed pupils' learning in classes in early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. During these observations, I looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. I also spoke informally to pupils about behaviour, attendance, how they learn how to keep themselves safe and about what it feels like to be a member of the St Margaret Mary community. I observed pupils' behaviour as they arrived at school and at lunchtime as well as in lessons. Discussions with eight school governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, helped to provide additional information. I looked at a range of school documents including the vetting checks on staff, the minutes of governors' meetings and the school's information about pupils' progress, attainment, behaviour and attendance. I also took account of the responses to Ofsted's pupil, parent and staff questionnaires.