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Mr Norman Duffin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Duffin

Short inspection of St Michael's Roman Catholic Primary School, Whitefield

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 September 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 kept a focus on pupils' academic achievement while strongly promoting pupils' all-round development. Staff work well as a team and everyone upholds the school's mission statement, including the goal 'to be a happy school, creating friendships and wonderful memories'. The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills and understanding is a strength that has a positive impact on all aspects of the school's work. Pupils make good progress from their different starting points and develop valuable personal skills that help them succeed in school and provide a strong foundation for further success.

Staff are affirming and encouraging, which helps pupils develop confidence. They are highly motivated and committed to their work. Comments from staff such as 'everyone at the school, both children and adults, are welcomed, included and helped to achieve the best they can', and 'we are a happy, hardworking staff' were typical. Pupils make an equally strong contribution to the school; they behave well and show respect and kindness towards each other. The 'Mini Vinnies' group are right to be proud of their work to help other children in school, as well as their charitable work to help people in the community and further afield. They uphold their motto 'see, think, do' with pride and care.

The governing body provides effective support and rigorous challenge to leaders. Governors know the school well and have a good range of skills. They have a full understanding of the school's performance because they assiduously seek

information, ask probing questions and meet regularly to discuss pupils' achievement.

You have taken appropriate action to address the recommendations for improvement from the last inspection. At that time, pupils' achievement at Key Stage 2 was below that expected given their starting points. You have managed changes to teaching staff and deployed teachers effectively to make the best use of their expertise. The new teachers at Key Stage 2 have brought additional skills and ideas and the reorganisation of teaching in the early years is proving effective. You have ensured that improvement planning and professional development has focused on the most important priorities. As a result, pupils' attainment in the national assessments in Year 6 and Year 2 improved in 2015, to be in line with or above national averages. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the early years was similarly above average.

You recognise the need to ensure that pupils' achievement is sustained at these higher standards. To this end, it is important that leaders check pupils' progress carefully in each year group to make sure that pupils are achieving the standards expected for their age at least. A few parents feel that the most-able pupils 'are not encouraged to reach their potential' because work in class and given for homework is not challenging enough. Although you are already taking effective action to make sure that the most-able pupils are challenged effectively in mathematics, you should usefully extend this focus.

Parents are very pleased with the school, and recognise the professionalism of staff, stating, for example that 'teachers are dedicated and friendly' and 'the school is very well managed by the Head and senior leaders. Parents are kept up to date via weekly newsletters and texts'. Parents particularly value the emphasis that the school places on pupils' well-being. Comments such as 'it is a lovely school with happy children and staff, where children thrive academically, socially and emotionally' and 'there is a very welcoming atmosphere and good community spirit' were typical. The inspection found parents' positive views to be fully justified.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that statutory requirements are met. You have improved record keeping since the last inspection, when it was an area for improvement. Records are detailed and give a clear indication of the actions taken to ensure pupils' well-being. All staff know the procedures to follow if they have any concerns about pupils' safety and have completed relevant training.

Pupils feel safe because they are cared for well by staff and are considerate towards each other. They make a strong contribution to the positive ethos of the school through their good behaviour. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy, both in and out of school and when using the internet because they are taught about risks and know who to turn to if they have any concerns. Their very good attendance reflects their enjoyment of school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, governors and teachers are taking appropriate action to keep teaching vibrant and raise pupils' achievement. The reorganisation of teaching has been managed well to make sure that teachers' expertise is used to best effect.
- Professional development is planned carefully to support whole-school priorities for improvement and develop teachers' skills. Staff are keen to learn from each other and work well as a team. Professional development is enhanced by links with other schools to support the sharing of good practice, your participation in the Bury Primary Learning Collaborative and contribution as a training school for students.
- Leaders at all levels are aware of the school's key strengths and areas for further development, arising from their checks on pupils' work and progress and observations of teaching. Subject leaders provide useful reports to Governors on the main findings from their monitoring. However, they do not currently undertake in-depth analysis of relative strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement from their various starting points and in relation to what is nationally expected for their age.
- Adults have created a very positive atmosphere for learning so that pupils feel able to 'have a go' or ask for help if they need it. Pupils enjoy lessons and there is a 'buzz' of purposeful talk as pupils work. They particularly value 'partner work' where they can share their ideas. As one pupil said, 'when you explain things to others or look at their work, it adds to your own understanding as well as theirs.'
- Classrooms are bright, well organised and lively; attractive displays support learning and celebrate pupils' achievements effectively. The 'working walls' provide useful prompts for successful writing and visual aids for mathematics.
- Most children enter the Nursery with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. They settle well and enjoy interesting and varied activities across the early years. They make good progress from their starting points in all areas of learning, so by the time they leave the Reception class they are prepared well for Year 1.
- The vast majority of pupils who are currently in school carry on making good progress in each year group. You are rightly keeping a careful check on pupils who have fallen behind, to make sure that they receive appropriate support to catch up.
- Work mostly meets the different learning needs of pupils very well. As a result, pupils stay focused on their work and learn effectively. Work in Year 5 and Year 6, for example, is challenging and interesting. However, a minority of pupils and parents feel that work could be more challenging for the most-able pupils in some other classes. Pupils' work seen during inspection also indicates that the most-able pupils could be challenged further in some of the other classes.

- In the early years and in Year 1 and Year 2, children's knowledge and skills in phonics are at the level expected for their age or above. Children enjoy the small group sessions and these reinforce their learning well. However, some children find it difficult to sustain their concentration in the whole class phonics lessons because their own knowledge and skills are at a different stage to the phonics being covered.
- Leadership of special educational needs provision has been strengthened, and staff work together effectively to support pupils who need extra help. Programmes to help pupils catch up are planned with care to make sure that pupils receive appropriate support.
- Disadvantaged pupils, who are supported by the pupil premium (additional funding from the government to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority), do just as well as others in school in reading and writing. However, their progress in mathematics has not been as good in the past. You are checking their progress carefully and gaps are closing.
- Pupils support each other in lessons and show care and consideration in shared areas of the school. The vast majority of pupils behave extremely well and have positive attitudes to learning. The parent and pupils questionnaire returns indicate that bullying is not a concern for the vast majority. Pupils say, for example that 'teachers resolve any issues quickly'.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is integral to all aspects of the school's work. Pupils develop a deep understanding of their own faith and show respect for the beliefs and traditions of people from faiths different to theirs.
- Governors and leaders engage effectively with the local authority so that they benefit from helpful external review and support. The recent 'health checks' conducted by the local authority have supported school improvement effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the improvements in pupils' achievement in 2015 are sustained by checking pupils' progress carefully in each year group and making sure that all pupils, especially the most-able and disadvantaged pupils, are making the best possible progress
- the procedures to monitor and evaluate the impact of teaching continue to improve, to take account of pupils' progress over time and their achievement in relation to age-related expectations
- homework and work in class is sufficiently challenging for the most-able pupils
- teaching supports pupils at different stages in their phonic knowledge and skills to learn effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, senior and middle leaders, five members of the Governing Body including the Chair and the school's local authority adviser. I spoke with pupils during lessons, around the school and in a meeting. I spoke with many parents at the start of the school day and took account of 31 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, and the school's recent survey of parents' views. I also took account of 22 responses to the online questionnaires from staff and 58 responses from pupils. I visited all classrooms during lessons and looked at samples of pupils' writing and mathematics in each class. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and at your self-evaluation and action planning. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe, and records of training, safeguarding checks and incidents.