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Mrs Annette Norman  
Acting Headteacher  
St Monica's Catholic Primary School  
St Monica's Close  
Appleton  
Warrington  
WA4 3AG

Dear Mrs Norman

### **Short inspection of St Monica's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 22 September 2015, 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 July 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your colleagues have succeeded in doing this, even during the leadership changes that have happened over the last nine months. Parents are very appreciative of the way that, as acting headteacher, you have ensured continuity in the life of the school. As one parent wrote: 'Last term the teachers worked under exceptional circumstances. They showed such dedication and commitment to the school. No one could have asked for more. We feel this needs to be acknowledged.' The governors have made good use of the expertise within the school and advice from outside to ensure the least disruption to pupils' learning.

The report on the last inspection referred to the need to give writing greater prominence within the school, through displays and celebrations of pupils' work. The attractive displays in corridors and classrooms, the opportunities for pupils to take part in poetry writing competitions and the focus on writing in all subjects show that, as a school, you have clearly acted on this.

The school has also made considerable strides in the other areas for improvement identified in the last report. Leaders have involved parents more closely in the life of the school; developed the skills of middle leaders; and improved the monitoring and quality of teaching. External tests and the school's own records show that, although standards compare well with other schools locally and nationally, pupils' achievement

is not consistent across subjects and year groups. You and the governors are fully aware of this and your development plans focus specifically on the areas where improvement is most needed. The plans do not always include specific criteria to measure the impact of intended improvements.

The pupils approach their work and play with tremendous enthusiasm. They enjoy the wide range of opportunities offered within and outside the classroom and strive to do their best, in an atmosphere where the highest standards are expected of them. They relate well to each other and to adults, and are welcoming and confident when talking to visitors. More than one parent praised the happy, family atmosphere in the school. This was borne out during my visit.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that the school's safeguarding policies are up to date and reflect the most recent legislative requirements. The school has robust systems for checking the suitability of staff to work with children. Records show that staff work closely with families and other agencies to ensure the safety of the pupils. Health and safety arrangements are clear and the pupils understand them. The pupils I met said that they felt safe in school and on the way to and from school. They knew how to keep themselves safe, including when using social media, and knew whom to contact if they had any concerns. They said there was very little bullying or misbehaviour and that it was dealt with swiftly and effectively if it happened. They all agreed that this was a good school and they would recommend it to others.

### **Inspection findings**

- The school has changed its system for checking on the quality of teaching. The main emphasis now is on how well teachers are helping pupils to learn. Senior leaders and subject leaders look at books, observe lessons and analyse test results to see whether pupils are making enough progress. As a result, they have an accurate knowledge of where teaching is effective and where additional support is needed to bring about improvements. The school's records show that there have been improvements in teaching but there is still further work to be done to ensure that it is consistently good in all subjects and year groups.
- Leaders and governors have worked hard and successfully to ensure that parents know about, and can contribute to, the life of the school. They take careful account of parents' views and have made several changes as a result. For example, the timing and format of parents' evenings have been changed and any parents who are unable to attend those meetings are invited to meet staff at other times. More workshops have been provided for parents on topics such as safeguarding and eSafety and, acting on feedback, leaders have revised the behaviour and charging policies, to ensure greater fairness in their application. Parent governors have also worked hard to gather the views of parents, so that

they are taken into account in updating the school development plan. The 14 parents and grandparents who spoke or wrote to me were also very pleased with the way that continuity had been maintained during the time of transition in the management of the school. All 48 respondents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to another parent. The responses to other questions were also positive, although a very small minority of parents said that they did not receive valuable information about their child's progress.

- The standard of writing in the school has improved. Test results for the last three years have been above the averages for schools locally and nationally. Work in pupils' books shows that they are being helped to write effectively, in a variety of styles and for a range of purposes. They are also encouraged to extend their vocabulary. However, even older pupils have difficulty in punctuating sentences accurately and they do not make regular and confident use of dictionaries to check and correct the spelling of words.
- You and your colleagues have established clear systems for checking on pupils' progress, in order to identify any individuals or groups who need extra help. This additional support is provided by staff in the school or specialists from outside and care is taken to ensure that it is effective. You have placed a particular focus on improving the attendance of vulnerable pupils, working with families to help ensure that pupils come to school regularly and arrive on time and ready to work. Your records show that improvements have been made as a result.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and detailed and based on a thorough analysis of data and other relevant information. It identifies the right priorities for the next stage of development, including tackling the recent decline in mathematics results and improving grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- The governors have been successful in ensuring that the recent changes to leadership have not disrupted the progress and development of the school. They have drawn very effectively on the experience and expertise within the school, as well as on the advice and support of the local authority and the diocese. They have clear plans and timescales for appointing a permanent headteacher. These plans are based on a careful analysis of local and national recruitment patterns and on the advice of the diocese and the local authority.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they eliminate the continuing variability in standards between subjects and year groups
- all plans have clear criteria to measure the extent to which specific goals have been achieved.

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, teachers, a representative from the local authority and three governors, including the vice-chair. I observed lessons and looked at pupils' books in each year group. I spoke to pupils in classrooms and around the school and held a meeting with eight pupils, selected at random from Years 3 to 6. I examined and discussed a range of documentation relating to pupils' progress and safeguarding. I also considered the views of 48 parents who completed the online Parent View, 14 parents and grandparents whom I met and two parents who wrote to me. In addition, I spoke to a number of support staff in and around the school.