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Ms Vicky Minihane  
Head of School  
St Mary's Catholic Primary School  
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Wolverhampton  
West Midlands  
WV10 8PG

Dear Ms Minihane

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

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the last inspection.

Since your appointment as head of school in 2016, after St Mary's became part of the Pope John XXIII Multi Academy Company, you have led with determination the implementation of an ambitious improvement agenda. Working alongside the executive headteacher, you successfully managed the expansion of the school, which became fully two-form entry in September 2017. As a result of the large increase in the number of pupils in key stage two, you had to appoint new teachers. You are providing these new teachers with effective support and training to ensure that the quality of teaching is maintained to a high standard. You benefit from the support of experienced and hard-working senior and middle leaders.

Within the Pope John XXIII Multi Academy Company governance structure, the academy committee provides the school with strategic support and contributes effectively to the evaluation of the actions you take to improve the school. In addition, the multi-academy company board of directors ensures that standards across the four schools that are part of the company are maintained and that close links are developed between the schools. You make the most of the support these arrangements can offer in terms of opportunities for pupils and professional development for staff.

Pupils at St Mary's are well behaved and they enjoy a pleasant and orderly environment. They are very positive about their school life and the vast majority benefit from the extra-curricular activities the school offers. The breakfast club, visits, and free music tuition are among the features that both pupils and parents comment upon with enthusiasm. There is a strong sense of community at St Mary's. While pupils who attend the school come from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, the inclusive ethos of the school and the values upheld by yourself and your staff contribute to create a highly cohesive community.

The varied intake of pupils in the school presents many challenges. Among those challenges, there is the growing number of pupils who join the school speaking little or no English, in some cases other than at normal points of transition. In addition, many children start school in the early years with language skills which are below what can be expected for their age. These issues played an important part in some of the disappointing results in the 2017 tests, especially in reading. You have accurately identified that the development of reading, starting with better-targeted support with phonics in the early years and key stage 1, had to be a key priority in the school's improvement plan for this year. You also set the improvement of attendance, especially for pupils whose circumstances may prevent them from attending school sufficiently regularly, as a target in your plan. These areas, together with securing more accelerated progress for children with low starting points in the early years, are where further progress is needed to continue to improve standards.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Checks on staff, visitors and premises are thorough, stored securely and kept up to date. The caring ethos of the school is shared by staff and pupils. As a result, pupils feel safe in the school and respect each other as well as adults. Through the curriculum, as well as in assemblies and presentations by external speakers, pupils are taught about risks and how to avoid them.

Staff receive regular training and you check that all adults who work at the school are fully aware of their responsibility to keep children safe. As the main designated safeguarding lead, with the support of the academy committee, you make sure that all staff remain vigilant and empowered to help vulnerable children. You work well with the local authority and other agencies to support pupils and their families. You follow up referrals to ensure that they are dealt with effectively.

### **Inspection findings**

- The proportion of children who reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year, while improving, has been consistently below the national average over the last three years. You are taking effective actions, with the early years leader you appointed in 2016, to make sure that children are better supported to make progress when they start at the school.

- You have identified that a large proportion of Children who join the Nursery and Reception Years do so at a level of development which is below what can be expected for their age. An increasing number of children speak little or no English when they start. You also have to take into account that about a third of children who join the Reception Year do not come from the school's Nursery. Since last year, the early years leader has implemented a thorough early evaluation of children's abilities when they start at the school in order to better target development support. Early years staff keep comprehensive records of progress, so that activities are adjusted when required to meet the needs of individual children. More emphasis is put on involving parents in the development of their children. An increased focus on early literacy and numeracy provides stronger foundations for accelerated progress. As a result, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development improved in 2017 and current school data shows that progress is being sustained.
- The teaching of phonics has been reorganised this year to build upon improvements in the early years and address the needs of the growing number of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Pupils are taught in ability groups. You have increased the number of support staff involved in phonics teaching so that pupils who are in danger of falling behind are provided with one-to-one or small-group catch-up sessions. Training to deliver phonics lessons where pupils are appropriately challenged was provided and there is a stronger emphasis on comprehension. Year 1 pupils who were asked to read unfamiliar texts that matched their reading abilities were able to do so with confidence. They used the skills acquired in phonics lessons to read unfamiliar words well.
- Following your analysis of the results that were less good than predicted in the key stage 1 and key stage 2 tests in 2017, you have taken a number of actions to improve outcomes. Your current improvement plan is focusing on two main areas. At key stage one, there is a focus on a more effective deployment of teachers and teaching assistants to support pupils with low starting points who are not making sufficient progress. At key stage 2, the priority is to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in reading. As a result of these actions, current pupils in key state 1 and 2 are making good progress from their starting points.
- There is now a better coordination of teaching and learning across key stage 1. Support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and pupils who speak English as an additional language is better targeted. There is also a greater coordination of actions between leaders and staff to ensure that activities to support individual pupils are having a positive impact on these pupils' outcomes.
- Your analysis of the 2017 key stage 2 reading tests revealed that many pupils fell just short of the national standards because of issues with more sophisticated vocabulary and their inability to get to the end of the tests. There is now a stronger emphasis on vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills in lessons. A staff survey revealed that some teachers lacked confidence in teaching reading. You have joined the local authority city wide reading project. A local authority adviser is currently working with staff to improve their confidence and the impact

of their teaching. In the work pupils routinely do in lessons there is an emphasis on developing their range of vocabulary, not just in English but across the curriculum. There is a clear momentum to develop reading skills across the school, but the new approaches are in the early stages of implementation and still need to be fully embedded.

- In sharp contrast with reading, attainment and progress in writing have remained above national averages. This is because teachers are far more confident with teaching writing. They compare their assessment results with colleagues from other schools within the multi-academy company. They also submit them to the scrutiny of the local authority to validate their judgements. As a result, teachers are clear about what the benchmarks are and provide their pupils with very effective guidance and support to meet the required standards by the end of key stage 2.
- The attendance of some disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is still below the national average. You are working hard to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly. In addition to rewards for good attendance, you are proactive in helping pupils to get to school every morning. The school runs a minibus service that collects pupils who have issues with transport. There is a subsidised breakfast club that all pupils can attend. You have a clear escalation system to follow up unjustified absences. Family support workers do home visits when required. You buy into the local authority welfare officer service to support families who are in challenging circumstances. The multi-academy company is currently considering appointing its own welfare officer to deal with persistent attendance issues.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further improve the support for children who join the early years with skills that are below those expected for their age, so that they make accelerated progress and are fully prepared for Year 1
- they continue to develop and embed the strategies in place to support the progress of pupils in reading at both key stage 1 and key stage 2
- they strengthen further the support for pupils whose attendance is not sufficiently high.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of Pope John XXIII Multi Academy Company, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Amieli  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. I met with a local authority adviser. I also met with the chair and vice-chair of the academy committee and the chair of the multi-academy company board of directors. I had a discussion with a group of key stage 2 pupils and spoke to other pupils informally. I made short visits to six classrooms with you and looked at pupils' work. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered 21 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered 24 responses to the staff survey.

I scrutinised various documents including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plan and the documents that you use to check the quality of teaching. We discussed the national test results and assessments undertaken by pupils in 2016 and 2017. I also looked at the school's published information on the website, as well as minutes of governing body meetings and information about attendance, behaviour and safety.