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Dear Mrs Yuen

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Aston-le-Walls

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a much smaller-than-average-sized primary school. It is a welcoming, friendly place to learn. You and your team have ensured that pupils enjoy their learning and are well cared for. As a result, pupils are happy and the majority of parents and carers are supportive. For example, one parent praised the 'very friendly and approachable staff', while another parent appreciated the 'family feel' of the school. You promote a nurturing ethos where pupils are valued and known well by you and your staff.

Relationships between adults and pupils are good. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school. They are respectful, pay close attention in class and behave very well. Consequently, pupils are enthusiastic and aspirational learners. For example, one pupil told me, 'I love art. I'm not very good at it but I enjoy learning all the skills so that I learn to get better at it.' Another pupil excitedly told me about how he was using computer technology to create and design an advertisement. 'There's so much to learn, and I'm really enjoying it,' he said.

You and your staff are passionate about the role of the school in the community and are determined for pupils to learn through the school's values of compassion, cooperation, tolerance and respect. Even though the school is small, you have ensured that pupils learn more about the wider world, by participating in events and learning experiences outside their immediate community. This is evidenced in the many awards achieved by the school, such as the religious education (RE) gold

quality mark and the terrific science school of excellence award.

The governing body provides you with effective support and challenge. Governors are knowledgeable and know the strengths of the school and the areas that need improvement. Governors regularly take part in relevant training and are ambitious to further develop their understanding and improve their effectiveness. They place a particular focus on the school's support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and for disadvantaged pupils. However, governors do not always check that the impact of funding for disadvantaged pupils has been precisely evaluated by leaders to ensure that pupils are consistently making at least good progress in line with that of their peers.

You have dealt effectively with the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. From my scrutiny of pupils' work and observations in lessons, it is clear that you have improved the quality of teaching to ensure that, in the majority of lessons, teachers ensure that work is well matched to the abilities of pupils. As a result, pupils said that they are interested and challenged to do their best in their learning.

Teaching assistants support pupils well in their learning. You provide focused training for teaching assistants and ensure that they are involved in whole-school improvement priorities through regular meetings. As a result, teaching assistants work closely with teachers and use skilful questioning to help move pupils on in their learning. In addition, they provide effective phonics teaching and good-quality targeted support for pupils in areas such as speech and language.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a good culture of safeguarding in the school. Governors and staff benefit from regular and relevant training on child protection. They know what to do to keep pupils safe. You work with families and refer concerns in a timely and prompt manner. Staff are vigilant and are prepared to take decisive action when needed, to secure pupils' well-being. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and said that they feel very safe. They said that incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are rare but when they do occur staff deal with issues quickly and fairly. Pupils feel well cared for by staff in school. One pupil told me that he feels that school is 'like a second home, because nobody is unkind to me and everyone is supportive'. Pupils are taught about potential risks and how to stay safe in different situations. These include how to use the internet safely and the dangers from fire.

Inspection findings

- A focus for the inspection was the quality of the teaching of mathematics. For the last two years, the progress pupils had made in mathematics by the time they left the school at the end of Year 6 has been below that in reading and writing.

You have acted promptly to improve standards in mathematics by reviewing the way it is taught. You accessed good-quality training for staff and introduced new strategies to ensure that the teaching of mathematics improved and that there is a consistent approach across the school. As a result, standards in mathematics improved in 2017, and a higher proportion of pupils attained the expected standards.

- The leader for mathematics is new to his role. He works actively with colleagues from other schools to ensure that the school keeps up to date with current good practice in the teaching of mathematics. He is determined to improve standards further and has purchased new resources to support staff in their teaching. Additional clubs and specialist teaching are also helping to raise standards. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics in order to deepen their understanding.
- During the inspection, you and I looked at the progress that different groups of pupils, particularly boys, make in their learning. The variability in number of pupils and range of abilities in different year groups makes year-on-year comparisons of pupils' attainment difficult. You have carefully analysed pupils' prior attainment and reviewed the frequency and reliability of current assessments. You check regularly to ensure that the progress that all groups of pupils, including boys, make in different subjects is at least good. Where it is not, you provide additional support to help pupils catch up. However, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is not tracked as precisely as it could be to enable governors to effectively evaluate the impact of leaders' actions and ensure that these pupils make good progress and attain as well as their peers.
- You have ensured that the school curriculum is based on pupils' interests and that topics of learning link well to visits to places of interest and visitors that inspire girls and boys to learn. For example, during the inspection, pupils benefited from a visit from the author and mountaineer Matt Dickinson, who inspired pupils to write about what it might be like to climb Mount Everest. One Year 2 pupil proudly showed his teacher how he had used a powerful simile to describe the snow on the mountain: 'The snow was as hard as obsidian.'
- Another focus for the inspection was the current quality of the leadership of the school. We discussed how, soon after the previous inspection, there were several changes of staff. You then became headteacher in September 2015, after the previous headteacher retired. You have successfully restructured the school to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, to better meet the needs of pupils. You worked well with the local authority and school governors to develop clear strategic plans for what was required to shape and drive the future of the school. These plans accurately inform school policies, actions and staff training. You have identified, for instance, that subject leaders need further training to develop their roles and responsibilities so that they are more effective in monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress and attainment.
- It was clear from my scrutiny of a range of policies and documents, as well as from my discussions with leaders, that the school is well led and managed. You want the very best for your pupils. Governors and staff hold you in high regard.

You have addressed head on some challenging issues you inherited, to ensure that standards remain high and continue to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics are consistently well developed across the school
- the progress of disadvantaged pupils is explicitly tracked so that leaders, including governors, have a more accurate understanding of the impact of the additional funding on pupils' outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Northampton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the leader for mathematics. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and I met with a group of pupils. I met with five members of the governing body.

We visited classrooms and I looked at a range of pupils' work. We discussed the progress of different groups of pupils and the school's plans for improvement. I considered the responses of 30 parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I also considered the responses of seven staff to Ofsted's online survey for them. There were no responses to the pupils' survey. I scrutinised evidence from a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance, procedures and records for safeguarding and behaviour, information on how the pupil premium is spent, an analysis of attendance and a number of policy documents. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, on the playground and during lunchtime.