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Mr Mark Brennan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brennan

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 October 2013.

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 worked particularly hard to develop other senior and middle leaders to good effect. Pupils are proud to be members of St Mary's Catholic Primary School because they report they are well cared for and supported. They feel safe and can identify what it is that makes them feel safe.

Pupils' behaviour is good and there are very few serious behaviour incidents. Parents agree that this is the case. Pupils and parents report that bullying is very rare also, again reassuring everyone that youngsters are safe in school. Parents have very positive views and many were very keen to tell me about how well they regard the school. Parents were particularly positive about how approachable you are, personally; how you always make time for them, and their children, despite how busy you are. Parents used words such as 'superb' and 'fantastic' to describe the school. Teaching is effective and engages pupils well. All adults promote high expectations. These are seen in pupils' conduct, the pride they take in their learning and the effort they make in their work.

Teachers ensure that different groups of pupils' needs are met well and that the key skills of reading, writing and mathematics are reinforced throughout the broad and balanced curriculum. The curriculum not only supports strong progress in these skill areas, but also ensures that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well enhanced, as is their understanding of British values. For example, pupils of different faiths learn about, and respect, the teachings of the Catholic faith and can also talk knowledgeably about other faiths. They understand the key differences

between the faiths as well as how different faiths share commonalities. Pupils reported on how their learning in class is supported by the trips they take, such as a recent trip to visit a mosque in Bradford.

You work well with your leadership team, who all understand the school's vision for further improvement. Governors are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and where the school could improve further. They are committed to their roles and undertake regular reviews of their work. They attend training as needed.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified two main areas for improvement. The first of which was to continue to improve the quality of teaching in the school. This area for improvement was further refined by inspectors, by asking leaders to ensure that the strongest practitioners were used to support other teachers in school. In addition, inspectors recommended that the pace of learning should be brisk and that pupils would work increasingly independently. In these areas, the school has worked effectively. Teaching is effective across all classes and leaders are well deployed to support less experienced teachers and to share best practice. Furthermore, learning is challenging and pupils work at an appropriate pace, meaning they work hard. In addition, teachers model work well, so that pupils understand their tasks and can work independently at times. This is also supported by the resources made available to pupils, which they can, and do, access independently.

At the last inspection, inspectors also recommended that you increased pupils' writing attainment and progress further by offering pupils more opportunities to write at length and to develop their range of vocabulary. In addition, they recommended that teachers gave pupils more time to reflect and respond to their feedback, which would support pupils' ability to improve their work further. Again, you have worked effectively in this area, with pupils writing regularly in a range of topics. You also support this area of pupils' development with strong teaching of reading, which serves to broaden pupils' range of vocabulary. As a result, pupils' writing outcomes are strong.

Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. You have worked to improve the early years provision, which has had some staffing changes in the past year. To this end, you have made improvements to the indoor provision, ensuring that children develop in a wide number of learning areas. However, as you acknowledge, the outdoor provision is still limited, with too few opportunities for children to develop in certain areas of their learning, including their reading, writing and number work. Leaders work effectively as a team and this is seen very clearly in your inclusion team, for example, where there are six leaders and other staff working closely on various aspects of supporting the most vulnerable pupils in your school. This includes the work to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The team focuses on all aspects of a child's provision, from their academic achievements, to their mental and physical well-being, and to supporting the parents and carers of these pupils. As a result, these pupils do well in school and become increasingly able to work independently.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that pupils are safe. Staff are well trained and this means they know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's safety. There are clear policies in place, which are easily accessible to staff and parents. In addition, there is information all around school which pupils can access to ensure they also know what to do, and who to speak to if they have worries. Policies are fit for purpose, regularly checked and updated so that the statutory requirements are met. Detailed records of any issues concerning pupils' safety are kept securely by the school and designated members of staff ensure that all relevant information is passed on to the right agencies. As a result, the school is able to access specialist support, where necessary. Such records also enable staff to have a fulsome understanding of any issues where a pupil's safety has been a concern in the past.

Inspection findings

- One focus during the inspection was to check pupils' progress at key stage 2. This has improved well in recent years, especially for disadvantaged pupils. I wanted to ensure that these improvements were sustainable and would continue. The work you have done to ensure that teaching is challenging and engaging means that all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are challenged and supported well and work hard. This helps them to reach their potential across the curriculum and especially in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Another area of focus was to understand what you are doing to improve attainment in the early years and at key stage 1, which is still below average. Children arrive with levels of development which are lower than expected for their age. In the early years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is below average, although it is improving, consistently, each year. The outdoor provision is not giving children enough opportunities to reinforce their reading, writing and number skills in the same way the indoor provision does this. Therefore, for those children who opt to learn outside this is holding their development, in these areas, back.
- When pupils arrive in key stage 1, their attainment is also lower than expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, in particular. Pupils make good progress during key stage 1 and this means that their attainment does improve and moves much closer to the expected level. Currently, pupils in key stage 1 are making strong progress. This was seen very clearly in pupils' work in books and strong teaching is supporting good standards of work in reading, writing and mathematics.
- An area that I looked at was the school's provision for disadvantaged pupils. These pupils' needs are closely considered by leaders and the inclusion team focuses specifically on this group, alongside other groups. Their academic progress is carefully monitored and where issues are identified, support is provided. Thanks to the strong work of the leaders overseeing this team, this support is varied, to meet pupils' needs closely. The focus may be on extra support for mathematics, or English. It may be more focused on supporting pupils' behavioural needs, or their attitudes to learning. However the pupils are

supported, it is working to develop these pupils well to ensure that the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are diminishing.

- During the inspection, I also wanted to understand how well pupils behave. Attendance rates have been an issue since the last inspection. Attendance has fluctuated, although it has remained above average. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has increased significantly, recently. There have been some legitimate reasons for this but monitoring pupils whose attendance is not high is not rigorous enough. This can mean that where persistent absenteeism is an issue, parents and carers are not clear enough that they must take immediate steps to improve their child's attendance. As a result, where this high level of absence is an issue, it is not quickly resolved.
- Other aspects of behaviour are strengths of the school. There have been no exclusions since the last inspection, meaning there have been no serious behaviour incidents. Bullying is very rare and where it occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils' conduct is strong and supports good attitudes to learning which, in turn, support strong progress.
- I also wanted to see how well assessment systems support leaders to ensure that pupils' outcomes are well understood. The system is clear and fit for purpose. Teachers know how to assess pupils' learning, accurately, and use this to identify any underachievement or gaps in the learning. They use this information to plan activities and leaders use the information to identify where extra support is needed. As a result, pupils achieve well.
- During the inspection, I was interested to understand how well the curriculum supports pupils' well-being, including enhancing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of British values. Pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and this means that they learn about a range of topics to develop their geography and history knowledge, as well as their science learning. Learning is supported by a range of trips and visitors into school to enhance their understanding. Special events also support pupils' understanding of the wider world. For example, during the inspection a large number of pupils had opted to eat soup and bread, rather than a full lunch, to understand how some children around the world do not always have enough to eat. Pupils told me they were doing it to appreciate what they have, recognise that not everyone is as lucky as them, and to use the money they saved by having a smaller lunch to donate to the school charity, which raises funds for children in the developing world. The event was part of the Lenten programme of events.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are regular opportunities for children in the early years to access activities outdoors which enhance all learning areas, particularly their reading, writing and number skills, so as to promote better progress in these skill areas during Reception

- where pupils are regularly absent, they understand, and their parents or carers understand, the importance of improving attendance immediately and of being in school every day, in order to benefit fully from the school's strong provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona McNally
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited a number of classes in school to observe teaching and its impact on learning. I also looked at a wide range of pupils' books from all year groups, across a variety of subjects. I met with you and your governors and with other senior and middle leaders. I also held a discussion with your school improvement partner. I looked at the school's information about the safeguarding of pupils and examined behaviour, attendance and bullying records. I also checked a range of other documentation, such as your self-evaluation, your school development plan and your monitoring information. I held formal discussions with pupils from key stage 1 and key stage 2 and spoke informally to pupils during breaktime. I also heard four pupils read from Year 2 and Year 6. I considered the 25 parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to a number of parents in the playground, as they dropped their children off at school. I also spoke to a group of parents who came into school to meet me.