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Ms Mylene McGuire
Headteacher
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Dear Ms McGuire

Short inspection of St Mary's RC Primary School Manchester

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You have made a significant difference to the school. You provide clear and unequivocal leadership, which has meant that, despite a number of planned absences of senior staff, the school continues to go from strength to strength. You receive high praise and unwavering support from the whole school community, including parents, pupils, staff and governors. Pupils' outcomes continue to rise, year-on-year in all key stages. You have promoted the culture of inclusion and mutual respect extremely well. Disadvantage is not a barrier to learning in St Mary's. Often, disadvantaged pupils do better than their peers.

A key reason for the school's success so far has been the careful and well-considered curriculum you have provided for the pupils. While achievement of high standards in the basic skills is the school's priority, enriching pupils' daily learning through a wide variety of creative experiences has helped to engender their love for learning. Pupils speak highly of their outdoor learning work, their trips and their community projects. The school's strong emphasis on personal development and sound values has created a harmonious and purposeful learning environment. Pupils feel valued and believe that the school truly lives up to its vision to 'celebrate the

uniqueness of every child’.

Parents and carers with whom I spoke during the inspection, and those who responded to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, were overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciate the care and support that their children receive from staff. You have been very proactive in establishing positive relationships with parents, and they appreciate everything that you and your team do for them and their families. One parent said of the school, ‘It’s a place of peace and happiness’ and another said, ‘I can’t thank staff enough for what they have done for my child.’

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to improve a number of areas. These included: improving the quality of teaching in mathematics and writing; sharing of good practice among staff; and ensuring that leaders check the impact of their work. You have ensured that the English and mathematics curriculum have been strengthened year-on-year. Subject leaders are knowledgeable. They have developed the programmes of study and have trained teachers well. Pupils’ writing has significantly improved, especially in key stage 2, where outcomes are now significantly above national averages by the end of the key stage. Teachers’ use of a single theme to promote pupils’ writing skills has been an effective approach. Pupils’ mathematics skills are improving year-on-year. The school’s chosen teaching approach to teaching mathematics has been successful. Pupils regularly apply their skills and knowledge to reason and solve word problems. Teachers share good practice regularly in school and also with colleagues from other schools. Teachers periodically check their judgements about pupils’ assessment with other colleagues.

Leaders have developed a strong monitoring strategy. Priorities are checked regularly through a range of activities and timely action is taken to remedy weaknesses. The evaluation of the pupil premium plan is an excellent example of how leaders meticulously measure the impact of their work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding leaders have a deep knowledge and understanding of how to keep pupils safe. They have developed reliable systems to support pupils to help them keep safe. Staff are well trained and understand their responsibilities well. Pupils speak confidently about their trust in staff’s ability to keep them safe and listen to their problems. Pupils apply the range of listening strategies available to them when they are worried or upset. These include the ‘worry monster’, the ‘chat zone’ and ‘gimme five’, where pupils in key stage 2 request time with their teacher in confidence.

Staff keep close contact with local professional agencies to support pupils and their families who are at risk. They are fully aware of the range of risks locally. The curriculum is developed well to promote pupils’ safety both physically and emotionally. The range of mindfulness techniques is highly valued by pupils and parents. The ‘digital leaders’ give presentations to pupils to help them keep safe online. Bullying is rare. Pupils’ differences are celebrated. Pupils demonstrate strong personal skills and empathy.

Parents and carers, pupils and staff agree that pupils are safe and well cared for at St Mary's.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I focused on some key lines of enquiry. Firstly, I investigated how effectively mathematics is being taught across the school, as the outcomes for this subject, while improving, have not been as high as those for English. I found that pupils were highly engaged with their learning in the mathematics lessons I observed. They cooperate with each other well to solve problems. Pupils' workbooks show that high-ability pupils are challenged regularly to tackle more complex tasks, where they can apply their skills to real-life problems.
- Leaders analysed the key stage 2 national test results and established that one barrier to pupils achieving their potential was their calculation skills, including their mental arithmetic and, for some, their reasoning skills. You have introduced a renewed focus on these areas of mathematics teaching across the school. Pupils practise their recall skills regularly. It is too early to fully measure the effectiveness of this increased focus, but early monitoring suggests that pupils are becoming more confident and fluent in some classes. Leaders recognise the need to embed this mathematics strategy in all classes to ensure success.
- Another line of enquiry was to investigate the progress and attainment of boys compared to that of girls because published outcomes information suggested that boys were lagging behind. Your monitoring information about current pupils' performance suggests that for most year groups the gaps in attainment between boys and girls are diminishing. Many boys are making good or better progress. In most classes, there is little difference in the quality of work produced by boys compared to girls. However, in a few classes, they fall short of the high standards reached by girls. Your current priorities and associated monitoring activities do not focus specifically enough on boys' achievement, especially among key groups.
- Since the majority of those pupils with special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND) are boys and the proportion of registered pupils in the school is higher than the national average, I also investigated the quality of provision for these pupils in the school. The SEND coordinator is highly skilled. She has devised a detailed provision map which identifies and provides effectively for the specific needs of targeted pupils. She rightly prioritises the relationship with parents and carers in supporting pupils' additional needs. Staff receive regular training and support to help them meet pupils' needs. As a result, most make the progress they should. Parents and carers with whom I spoke praised the sensitive care and commitment that staff show towards their children. One parent wrote in the online survey that she received 'great support during the SEN assessment process, and the ongoing support is outstanding'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the plans for improvement focus more specifically on boys' progress, especially in certain classes
- they embed the calculations and mental arithmetic policy across the school to improve pupils' skills in this area.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Salford and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met the person responsible for maintaining the single central register and the designated safeguarding leader and the inclusion team. I met with the SEND coordinator. I spoke on the telephone with the local authority improvement adviser and I met with five governors. With you, I observed learning in nearly all classes (some were participating in swimming lessons). I spoke with a group of pupils from key stages 1 and 2. Along with senior leaders, I examined a range of pupils' workbooks. As well as speaking with parents and carers at the school gates in the morning, I took account of 41 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 33 free-text responses and one piece of feedback given directly to Ofsted from a parent. I took account of the 33 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 138 responses to the pupils' survey. I looked at a range of school documents, including: information about pupils' achievements; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; information related to the monitoring of teaching; and external reviews carried out by the local authority as well as documents relating to safeguarding.