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Mr Patrick Smyth
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Chorley
Hornchurch Drive
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Dear Mr Smyth

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Chorley

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 2016, 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 St Mary's was judged to be good in May 2011.

There have been some changes in staffing since the previous inspection. The early years provision was extended in September 2015 to include a Nursery class. This followed the closure of the privately run pre-school provision on the school site.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Everyone has a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. The pride you, the staff and the governors share in the school's success is matched by a steely determination to secure further improvement. Everyone has bought into your ambitious plans for the future and all are willing to play their part in the next stage of the school's journey. Staff trust you to lead the way because they have confidence in your decisions and agree that change is managed carefully. Responsibility for improvement is shared evenly. You are successfully harnessing the skills, expertise and enthusiasm of other leaders to improve teaching across all subjects and enrich the experiences that pupils gain at school. This is working very well. Pupils leave Year 6 as well-rounded youngsters who are more than ready to take on the challenges of secondary school due to their above-average academic standards and their well-honed social skills.

Inspectors identified a number of strengths when they visited your school in 2011. None of these have been lost in the intervening years. Pupils are happy to cross the school

threshold each day because they feel safe, trust their teachers and enjoy their learning. This is reflected in their regular attendance and good levels of punctuality. Few pupils miss out on school and attendance rates are above average for all groups. Pupils' eagerness to learn, their excellent manners and the warm relationships they share with adults underpin their good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Pupils continue to benefit from a rich and varied curriculum, which gives everyone a chance to excel. Classrooms are alive with pupils' success in subjects such as history, science and art. The excellent models created by Year 3 pupils to recreate village life in the Stone Age era is just one example of the lively learning opportunities that pupils face each and every day. The marked increase in the number of pupils participating in sport-related activities clearly signals your success in improving the quality of physical education offered at St Mary's. This reflects the good use of the primary school sport funding.

The previous inspection identified some shortcomings in teaching. You wasted no time in tackling this weakness. Teaching is stronger than at the previous inspection because you use all of the external support available to constantly refresh teachers' skills. Agreed ways of working are followed to the letter. All teachers keep to the whole-school policy when marking pupils' work and everyone is following the new system for teaching mathematics. New teachers are brought up to speed quickly so that pupils have a smooth journey as they move from class to class. Teachers are effective in capturing pupils' interests through exciting activities. Their good subject knowledge means that they introduce new learning well, ask probing questions and are adept at unpicking any muddled thinking. They use mathematical resources effectively to help pupils understand new ideas. Pupils are full of praise for their teachers and are happy with all that St Mary's has to offer.

The parents I chatted to at the start and end of the school day were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. The responses to Parent View and the free texts comments written by some parents mostly confirm these findings. Almost all parents would recommend the school to others.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality.

You and the governing body keep abreast of all safeguarding requirements and ensure that these are met in full. Policies and procedures are detailed and up to date. School staff receive frequent and relevant training. This means that they are well equipped to spot, and report, any signs of potential harm to the pupils in their care. Your records show that concerns are taken seriously and followed up rigorously to ensure that pupils are free to flourish. You seek and act on advice and you use a range of external services, including the police and social services, to help support pupils and their families. You keep a close eye on pupils' behaviour. Poor behaviour and any alleged incidents of bullying are recorded and followed up with appropriate actions. This documentation shows that behaviour is improving over time and bullying is a rare occurrence. All of the adults who work at, or visit, your school are checked thoroughly to make sure that they do not pose any risk to pupils at St Mary's.

The pupils I spoke to during the day and those who completed the online survey all say that they feel safe at school. Pupils told me they have no concerns about being bullied or being called hurtful names because this type of behaviour is very rare. They have a great deal of confidence in the adults around them to keep them safe, to listen to their concerns and to take action to resolve any issues. Almost all of the parents who shared their views agree that pupils are safe and free from bullying. Pupils are gaining the skills to keep themselves safe because this is an integral part of the school's curriculum. They have a good understanding of how to avoid risk when using the internet because teachers use real-life stories to help pupils understand the potential risk of forming online friendships with strangers.

Inspection findings

- You keep a close check on the work of the school and use this information well to identify any weaknesses. Consequently, my findings held little in the way of surprise to you or the governors. You know what needs to improve. Your carefully crafted action plan shows that work is already underway to strengthen pupils' achievement in phonics (the sounds that letters make) and mathematics.
- Governors know the school well because they have a good grasp of data, they visit the school frequently and they are not afraid to ask challenging questions. Their work in championing the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is particularly noteworthy. Their close attention to the progress and attendance of this group is going a long way in eroding achievement gaps. Governors are keen to improve along with the rest of the school. They review their effectiveness regularly to make sure that they are fulfilling their role and adding value to the leadership team.
- Recent changes in the early years, including the establishment of a Nursery class, is strengthening the effectiveness of this area of the school. Children get off to a flying start during their time in Nursery and Reception. Strong teaching means that children gain a firm foundation for future success. They are attentive listeners, willing speakers and more than able to work on their own or with their friends. The early years fosters a love of learning which promotes children's positive attitudes to school. They are well prepared for Year 1. In 2015, three quarters of the Reception class reached a good level of development and almost one third were working beyond the levels expected for their age.
- Pupils build on their strong starting points in reading and mathematics in Key Stage 1. Most make strong progress in these subjects by the time they leave Year 2. Their gains in writing are not as marked. However, progress is sometimes limited in this area of the school. This is because expectations of what pupils know and can do are not always high enough and not all pupils are challenged to do their very best.
- Pupils' success in the Year 1 phonics check dipped last year. However, this is not the start of a worrying decline. You have learnt from your mistakes and put rigorous steps into place to make sure this does not happen again. Phonics is taught well across the school because sessions are carefully organised, adults have been suitably trained and everyone follows the whole-school system closely. Teaching sessions are lively. They are particularly effective in helping children and pupils to form letters, know how to break up the sounds in new words and understand common spelling patterns.

- Pupils' progress in mathematics has floundered in recent times. Although it broadly meets the national average, it is not as strong as reading or writing by the end of Year 6. The tide is turning because your actions are making a difference to how this subject is taught. Pupils' books show that they are gaining a sense of number, patterns and calculations. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to put these new-found skills into action by solving problems that involve logic and reasoning.
- Respect and tolerance, underpinned by the Catholic ethos, pervade your school. As one pupil commented: 'We treat each other as we want to be treated ourselves.' Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities and make a contribution to the school. It was a real pleasure to watch the older pupils acting as buddies to children in the early years. Their gentle and patient approach was making a real difference to children's confidence and self-esteem. These aspects of school life, underpinned by your rich curriculum, are highly effective in nurturing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and fostering their understanding of British values.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they help Key Stage 1 pupils to make even greater gains in their learning, particularly in writing, so that standards rise further by the end of Year 2
- pupils have greater opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to solve more complex problems, including those that involve logic and reasoning.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire County Council and the Director of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, two middle leaders and five governors. I held discussions with a representative from the local authority and a group of older boys and girls. I also spoke to a number of pupils of different ages during playtime. We visited every classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. I chatted to a small number of parents at the start and end of the school day. I took account of the 60 responses on Parent View, including the 27 free text responses. I considered the 26 responses from the staff online questionnaire. I also evaluated the 42 online responses completed by pupils.

I considered a range of school information, including your checks on teaching, your self-evaluation and your current action plan. We discussed your assessments of pupils' progress across the school. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including your policies to keep children safe, staff training, safeguarding checks on adults who work and visit the school and the records you keep of any concerns raised about pupils' safety.