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Mr Jon Murray  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Catholic Primary School  
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Cheshire  
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Dear Mr Murray

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

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 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 May 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your deputy, in partnership with a proactive governing body, have continued to develop the school and raise outcomes for the pupils in your care. All the staff I talked to, or who had completed the online questionnaire, were positive about the school and the improvements that you have initiated. Staff new to the school, or at the start of their teaching careers, felt well supported. You take the care of your staff seriously and are striving to ensure a sensible work-life balance. This is reflected in the positive Catholic ethos which permeates the school. This is a happy school with a positive culture.

We discussed the changing context of the school and identified the variability between classes, with some cohorts having disproportionate numbers of disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This has a particular impact on outcomes lower down the school. The number of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average. During these discussions, we agreed that aspects of the school website are not fully compliant with requirements.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic about their learning. Attendance continues to be good and is consistently above the national average. Pupils thrive in the happy, vibrant and nurturing environment that you have helped to create. They are confident and those I spoke to talked excitedly about their achievements and progress in reading, writing and mathematics, which have continued to rise. They particularly enjoy their outdoor learning experiences, which allow them to develop

an understanding of the natural world, and encourage resilience and the ability to work collaboratively. Their attitudes also reflect the values of kindness, respect, humility and tolerance, which the school openly promotes. They are welcoming and inquisitive.

The governors I spoke to know the school well. They talked with confidence about what the school does well. Governors have challenged senior leaders, for example, about the need to ensure greater depth to pupils' learning. They have high ambitions for the school and offer good support to school leaders. They are active and are regularly seen by pupils and staff around the school. Their visits are focused and purposeful. Governors play a key role in working with staff and school leaders to shape school priorities.

Most parents and carers who completed the online questionnaire were complimentary about the school, both in terms of academic achievement and nurture and care. In their eyes, the school provides 'a combination of a caring and supportive environment for learning, which allows their children to feel safe in and do well'. Parents typically stated, 'St Mary's is a very welcoming school, and you feel that as soon as you walk through the door.'

You have managed to resolve successfully most issues raised in your last inspection in 2014. However, you acknowledged that your attempts to ensure that teaching challenges most-able pupils have proved elusive. This is reflected in the fact that fewer pupils than nationally achieve greater depth in their learning. You are continuing to address this issue. We agreed that there is a need to improve outcomes for pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics. To this end, from September, you decided to teach science discretely and ensured that sufficient time was allocated. Pupils' work shows that this has been successful. There is a clear structure to their scientific understanding. We noted, in lessons, that appropriate use was being made of scientific language, and investigation was firmly at the core of pupils' learning. You recognise the need to concentrate now on improving other subjects such as design and technology, history and geography, which currently are not being taught with sufficient rigour and depth.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You make the welfare and safety of your pupils a high priority. You, your staff and governors are committed to keeping children safe. Safeguarding checks and procedures are thorough, and all staff working with pupils have received relevant training. They have a good understanding of procedures to follow should they be concerned about a child's welfare. Staff also talked with confidence about the latest national concerns relating to the 'Prevent' duty to keep children safe from extremism. The school works well with other agencies to support vulnerable families. Pupils described the school as 'a safe place to be'. They are confident that they can share any worries they have with an adult and they confirmed that incidents of bullying are very rare and are always promptly dealt with. They verified that behaviour around the school is good and that there is minimal disruption in lessons.

## Inspection findings

- Under your direction, staff have worked hard to improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics, especially at key stage 2. The number of pupils who attain the expected level in these subjects is well above the national average. As a result, when pupils leave school, they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- The fluctuating outcomes in Reception reflect the variations in knowledge and skills of the pupils on entry. Outcomes have improved over the last few years, and the number of pupils who achieve a good level of development hovers just above the national average. In the Reception class, there has been a strong focus on establishing routines and adult-led activities, particularly those linked to reading, mark making and number. Pupils are introduced to phonics at an early age, and this has led to a marked improvement in the number who achieve the expected standard in the Year 1 national assessment. Last year, 94% achieved the expected standard, which is well above the national average. However, disadvantaged pupils do less well than their peers nationally. Pupils enjoy reading, and those I spoke to read regularly both in school and at home.
- By the end of key stage 1, momentum has been maintained and a clear pattern established. The number of pupils who reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is well above the national average for all pupils. However, the issue of greater depth is also clearly emerging. In 2017, despite achieving the expected standard, the number of pupils achieving greater depth was well below the national average, with disadvantaged pupils doing particularly badly. Current data reflects this trend across all year groups, although some pupils do manage to catch up by the end of Year 6.
- You, your leadership team and governors are acutely aware that insufficient numbers of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, achieve to a greater depth in their reading, writing and mathematics. Furthermore, most-able pupils do not make the progress they should. Scrutiny of work and our visits to classrooms identified that many of the strategies being employed by teachers were not challenging enough to meet the needs of these pupils. The exception is Year 6, where pupils made the most significant progress.
- Your school improvement plan identified the need to develop subjects other than English and mathematics. You have successfully initiated improvements in science this year, and there is strong evidence that art and music are thriving. We reached agreement, based on evidence, that design and technology, history and geography were poor relatives in comparison to these other subjects. There was very little evidence available at inspection to show that these subjects are being taught with any continuity or rigour, apart from in Year 6. The leadership of these subjects is at an embryonic stage.
- You acknowledged that design and technology were not taught in sufficient depth, and you discussed your plans to teach this subject through design and technology weeks, which would allow for greater continuity in designing, making and evaluating products.

- We looked at examples of pupils' work in history and geography and identified that in many cases these subjects provide a context for writing rather than in-depth subject knowledge and understanding. Frequently, English learning objectives are paramount. For example, pupils have used some excellent resources on the Anglo-Saxons relating to the Sutton Hoo burial to produce some well-written and creative writing. However, their knowledge of Anglo-Saxon history is very limited. They were unable to explain where the Anglo-Saxons originated from and why they settled in England. Several thought they came from Scotland, and none knew who Alfred the Great was. This reflects weak learning in history.
- The school website provides a wealth of information about the school. However, all the information is not always easily accessible. There is also a lack of evaluative comment about the impact of pupil premium and sports premium funding. Information about governance is also out of date.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to strive to develop strategies which will enable pupils, particularly those who are more disadvantaged and the most able, to make better progress and reach higher standards
- design and technology, history and geography are taught to a greater depth
- the website is updated to ensure that it is fully compliant with current requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, members of the governing body, staff and pupils from several classes. I held a telephone conversation with your school improvement partner. Accompanied by you, I visited classrooms across the school to see the learning that was taking place. I looked at examples of pupils' work in their books. In particular, I looked at work in their science and challenge curriculum topic books. A range of documentation was considered, including the single central record, the school self-evaluation, the development plan and the

school's own assessment information relating to both past and current progress. I took account of 39 responses from parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. Consideration was also given to the Ofsted online questionnaires completed by 12 members of staff. No pupils completed the online questionnaire.