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Mrs Isobel Vassallo
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Westgate Road
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Dear Mrs Vassallo

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 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 successfully created a welcoming, caring and very harmonious atmosphere, where all feel valued. Your clear and determined leadership has been inspirational to others and staff morale is high. Together with governors and senior leaders, you have sustained the school's high expectations for pupils' work and behaviour. The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school and hold it in high esteem. Parents and carers said that the school community is caring and inclusive and that it feels 'like a family'. Pupils share this level of pride in their school and those in Year 6 spoke enthusiastically about taking responsibility as prefects. They also told me how much they enjoy supporting and looking after younger children through the reading buddy scheme and in the playground.

Pupils' consistently good attendance rates reflect the clear messages you communicate about the importance of attending school regularly and on time. Close links with three local Catholic churches help support learning about pupils' own faith. In addition, the diverse workforce and members of the local community from other cultural backgrounds help to ensure that pupils learn about the beliefs and customs of others.

Governors fulfil their statutory duties effectively. They know the school well and provide effective support and a good level of challenge. They gather information from a range of internal and external sources, and ask searching questions that help the school improve its performance. They make visits to the school and gather the views of staff, parents and pupils. They have made difficult financial decisions recently to ensure that they maintain the high quality of education, while still ensuring value for money.

The previous inspection took place before the school became an academy. At that time, the school was asked to ensure that teachers always encouraged pupils to participate actively by answering questions to explain their knowledge and understanding. You have addressed this by developing opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to talk. Pupils routinely explain and justify ideas to teachers and to each other. The school was also asked to ensure that pupils eligible for the pupil premium, who have additional needs, make better progress in writing. The assessment information shows that this has been tackled successfully. Pupils write widely across the curriculum and the skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar are taught systematically. This has resulted in pupils developing as accurate and confident writers. Pupils' writing across the school is of a good standard, handwriting is neat and pupils produce well-crafted pieces. They are aware of audience and older pupils write at length. All pupils have opportunities to improve their writing and have useful targets to help them make good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have established a strong safeguarding culture at the school. Staff have up-to-date training and are vigilant in spotting changes in the behaviour of pupils who may be at risk from harm. This includes pupils who may be at risk from child sexual exploitation. Staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe and have a good knowledge of the most up-to-date statutory guidance.

Leaders work in close partnership with outside agencies to keep pupils from harm. You provide timely and effective support for parents to help them to keep their children safe. For example, leaders organise workshops for parents about online safety. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of contexts because staff regularly discuss this with them. Pupils know they are too young to use social media and what steps they should take to keep themselves safe online. Pupils understand what constitutes bullying and feel there is very little bullying in the school. They know what to do if they are aware of bullying and that the adults will help them. This is supported by the school's record-keeping.

Inspection findings

- The school has rightly identified the need to accelerate progress and improve outcomes for the small number of disadvantaged pupils. I looked at how well leaders identified and addressed the main barriers faced by these pupils. I also considered how effectively the additional funding was being used to support the development of skills in reading and mathematics.
- I found that you and your leaders know pupils well and quickly identify issues that might prevent them from learning. You have established effective strategies and interventions to help narrow the differences between some disadvantaged pupils and others.

- You have identified some very creative uses for the pupil premium funding. These ensures that social and emotional barriers to learning are effectively addressed, as well as developing resilience and appropriate risk-taking for identified individuals.
- Leaders set ambitious targets for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, and regularly check progress against them. As a result, progress has improved.
- You have ensured that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is central to provision and governors use the individual pupil assessment information when holding leaders to account.
- You have added two additional teachers in Year 6 to allow for additional support and challenge in mathematics at some points during the day. This ensures that challenge is appropriate for different abilities and pupils are highly motivated and engaged. As a result they make significant progress.
- Pupils in some year groups benefit from being challenged and moved on with their learning once key concepts are achieved. There are some inconsistencies across the school. In some cases, pupils spend too long doing work they can already do before moving on to more challenging tasks.
- I also looked at the wider reading experience for all pupils, particularly those in key stage 1 who had not achieved the higher levels by the end of Year 2 despite leaving the early years at expected and exceeding levels. I found that the school's systematic phonics programme has improved reading outcomes for all, particularly those in key stage 1, and differences are rapidly closing.
- Guided reading sessions explicitly teach the range of skills pupils need to become effective readers and teachers pay particular attention to developing comprehension and vocabulary skills, which is supporting good progress.
- Pupils were keen to show me the new reading material in their reading corners. This has resulted in raising the profile of reading and ensuring that all groups and abilities are very well catered for. Key stage 1 pupils told me they liked the fact that they could borrow books and take them home to share with their parents. One pupil was so pleased to be able to read so many exciting books that she suggested I might like to borrow a book too.
- The more challenging free readers and scheme books in key stage 1 motivate and engage pupils. They are keen to read and develop their confidence well.
- Reading is encouraged right across the curriculum. For example, pupils demonstrated their ability to use retrieval and inference skills during a writing task about Robin Hood. They read information about the character to determine what his appearance and personality might have been like.
- Finally, I looked at how effective the early years curriculum is in engaging boys and preparing them for the next phase of education. Differences in achievement between different groups narrowed a little in 2017 and results at the end of the early years were in line with national results. However, there has been a significant difference between boys and girls for some time, and disadvantaged boys do significantly less well than others do.
- I tracked pupils into key stage 1 and noted that the school has implemented effective interventions and transition measures that support these groups particularly well. The

school has already put much in place and appointed an external consultant to help develop provision further. Some themes have been introduced that boys find particularly interesting and do not disadvantage girls. They are linked to inside and outside provision and are continuously monitored to ensure that pupils access learning effectively.

- Senior leaders have experience in the early years and are developing the capacity of early years staff. Succession planning is in place and is having a positive impact on provision, assessment, curriculum and staff development.
- Home visits are being used very effectively to identify needs before pupils start, so the correct provision can be put in place.
- Speech and language support has a high curriculum profile. As a result, language development is supported well and needs are quickly identified.
- Leaders have linked early years outcomes to performance management. This has been a successful strategy in improving outcomes throughout the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the successful practice, observed in some classes in mathematics, is shared across the school so that all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, are challenged and have more opportunities to develop their mathematical thinking
- the early years provision is developed so that all children are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

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

Yours sincerely

Lou Anderson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- I held meetings with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and governors.
- I scrutinised pupils' work in English, mathematics, reading and topic books.
- I visited lessons in key stages 1 and 2 to observe learning.
- I talked to pupils about their learning at both formal and informal times throughout the day.

- I listened to pupils reading in class in key stages 1 and 2.
- I met with parents at the start of the school day and analysed responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- I analysed responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaires.
- I scrutinised documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, pupils' attendance information, documentation related to safeguarding, and the school's assessment and behaviour information.