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Mrs Carmel Ruane
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Ruane

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Littleborough

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 the school was judged to be good in October 2011.

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 leadership team have created a school in which pupils are happy and ready to learn, parents are supportive and staff are proud to belong there. This is testament to your calm and confident leadership. As a parent commented to me, 'Seeing my child skip across the yard laughing and happy indicates how much work goes on behind the scenes.'

Since the last inspection, you and a significant number of your staff are new to the school. You have steered the school well in making the necessary improvements that were identified during the inspection of 2011. Pupils' mathematical skills are greatly improved in key stage 2, especially for the most able pupils, and standards are above national averages. Your staff have embraced the new curriculum changes in mathematics with energy and enthusiasm, and this is paying dividends. You rightly identify that mathematics in key stage 1 needs to reflect and support the improvements made in key stage 2. Plans have already been put in place and pupils' basic mathematical skills at key stage 1 are steadily improving.

The provision in the early years has seen the most notable improvements. The children thrive in an environment with clear systems and routines. The resources, both inside the classroom and outdoors, are developing children's learning effectively.

Leaders are refreshingly honest in their evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is reinforced with a development plan that is specific and deliverable. You have clearly set out what future success looks like, and mapped out how you and your staff will get there. For example, you know exactly what needs to be done to improve the standards in writing across the school.

The pupils at this school are captivating and cheerful. The pupils I spoke to genuinely struggled to identify how their experience of school could be improved. They unanimously spoke of how they love coming to school. This is indicative of the commitment that you and your staff have to developing the pupils into young people who have a sense of right and wrong, and who want to make a difference within society. The pupils are very uncomfortable with the concept of 'tolerance': they 'celebrate' difference. The work that you have done to promote equality of opportunity for all is commendable.

Governors, too, share your dedication and zeal. They have struck the right balance between challenge and support, and governors carry out their duty with thoughtful scrutiny. Governors lead the way in ensuring that everyone at St Mary's is looking in the same direction and working hard on the actions that will bring about further improvements.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders are attentive and steadfast in providing a safe and caring environment for pupils. All staff have received training in the latest developments to deepen their awareness and understanding of keeping children safe. The pupils commented on how much they enjoy the regular sessions on how to keep safe and healthy, especially the sessions delivered by outside agencies. The pupils spoken to were very clear about what constitutes safe and unsafe situations when with strangers or when they are using the internet or social media. All around the school there are signs and posters about whom pupils can talk to if they have any worries or concerns.

Inspection findings

- It is evident from work in books that progress is being made across a range of subjects. Pupils' grammar and punctuation are strong but words that they encounter frequently are often misspelt.
- The curriculum is very well balanced and pupils clearly enjoy their learning and progress well in foundation subjects.
- Standards achieved by pupils at the end of key stage 2 are much stronger than at the end of key stage 1. Leaders are well aware of this and have implemented improvement strategies that are already having an impact.

- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils continues to remain strong. This is because pupil premium funding is spent wisely and appropriately. Leaders and governors continually evaluate the impact of the strategies funded by the pupil premium allocation.
- The most able pupils are well supported in their learning. These pupils are enjoying the new mathematics curriculum as it allows them to really think deeply.
- The sport premium funding is spent well. The pupils are enthusiastic about all the extra-curricular sports activities that are available. The uptake and engagement of pupils are very high. Every sports club has a waiting list.
- Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points.
- Attendance is similar to national averages and the number of pupils persistently absent is monitored and is reducing.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. The school keeps thorough logs and records of incidents. The pupils spoken to say that bullying does not happen but, if it did, they are confident it would be dealt with quickly and effectively. The school's own records support this view.
- The school has ensured that there is equal opportunity for all. For example, the curriculum and teaching are well adapted to meet the needs of the disproportionate number of boys, while not disadvantaging the girls. You have also established links with a local school of a different faith. The pupils have really enjoyed finding out about Islamic beliefs and practices.
- The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school. It is evident that communication with parents has greatly improved in recent years.
- Reading takes place every day at the school for all pupils. The library is well resourced and pupils spoke to the inspector about how much they enjoy reading.
- The learning walk I undertook with you demonstrated that there was progression as we moved through each key stage, and that leaders have an accurate grasp of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the basic mathematical skills of pupils in key stage 1 continue to improve
- a greater proportion of boys achieve the early learning goal in writing
- pupils are able to spell words they encounter frequently with greater accuracy.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you, senior leaders and six members of the governing body, and I was able to speak to a representative of the local authority and the diocese. With you, I conducted a learning walk, visited all classes and had the opportunity to speak to pupils and see their work. I met with a group of pupils during the day. I spoke with a number of parents at the school gates and took account of 37 'free text' comments and 64 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also received one letter from a parent. There were 20 responses to the online staff questionnaire and five responses to the pupil questionnaire. I also scrutinised your assessment information, school improvement planning, behaviour and attendance logs, a number of case studies, the single central record, and other safeguarding procedures and practices.

I considered in detail a number of questions:

- How well have leaders addressed the areas for improvement as identified in the last inspection?
- How well has the early years foundation stage improved and is it laying the basis for learning in key stage 1 and beyond?
- How effectively has the pupil premium funding been spent and what has been the impact?
- How effectively has the sport premium funding been spent and what has been the impact on attainment and participation?
- What has been the impact of the school's equality plan in ensuring equality of opportunity?
- How effective are safeguarding procedures and practice, and what type of culture have these established?