

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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8 February 2018

Mr Chris Wilkins  
Executive Headteacher  
St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School  
Kirklands Road  
Carlisle  
Cumbria  
CA2 4JD

Dear Mr Wilkins

### **Short inspection of St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 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 April 2013.

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

The leadership team has successfully maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders' work is underpinned by their strong shared ambition for the school and its pupils. They have skilfully overseen the establishment of the St Ninian Catholic Federation, a formal partnership with another local school. Staff spoke positively about the benefits they see in working closely with another school, and morale is high. Parents, too, are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One typical comment was, 'This is a great school. The children are at the heart of everything they do.'

Pupils are polite, friendly and provide visitors with a warm welcome. The extremely high standard of behaviour observed in the last inspection has been maintained, and pupils' conduct in lessons, in the dining hall and on the playground is first-rate. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. They work hard and they say that they like coming to school because they enjoy learning and being with their friends. Pupils are confident and articulate when talking about their work or expressing their views and ideas. Rates of attendance have improved year on year and are consistently better than the national average. Few pupils regularly miss time in school.

Leaders' clear vision for the school extends to the design of the school's curriculum, which has a strong emphasis on improving pupils' subject knowledge and broadening their life experiences. Work in pupils' books shows that they are developing their knowledge very well across the curriculum, learning about contrasting topics such as the Romans, Renaissance artists and the American Civil

War. They are also encouraged to carry out independent research and learn relevant subject-specific skills, such as how to use maps accurately. Educational visits are planned to complement and enrich pupils' learning, including trips to historical sites and museums, and residential visits. The curriculum is further enhanced with a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, which include dance, drama, choir and various sports activities.

You have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement that were identified by the previous inspection. Practical activities in subjects including science and mathematics are set at an appropriate level to engage pupils and to challenge their thinking. There is evidence of good-quality pupils' writing in different genres throughout the school, both in books and on displays in corridors and classrooms.

Leaders have also secured notable improvements in other areas, and most notably in the effectiveness of early years provision at the school. Children get off to a strong start in early years. They benefit from having access to well-planned activities both indoors and outside, and from the skills and knowledge of the early years staff, who skilfully develop and understand children's learning. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development by the end of early years has risen to be typically in line with the national average. This is indicative of the positive impact that leaders have had since the previous inspection, and of good capacity within the school to continue to make further improvements.

You, your fellow leaders and governors all know the school very well. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school development plan identifies well-chosen areas for improvement. For example, you have identified areas in which pupils' outcomes need to be strengthened, such as the performance of the most able pupils in key stage 2 and of disadvantaged pupils across the school. There are indications that actions that you have taken are having a positive impact and these aspects of pupils' performance are improving strongly.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Rigorous checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children. These checks are recorded meticulously. Staff and governors receive regular training to ensure that their understanding of good practice in safeguarding is up to date. Staff know the procedures to follow if they are worried about a pupil's welfare and leaders make sure that any such concerns are rigorously followed up. The school works closely with external agencies and has taken a proactive approach to providing care for vulnerable families through its participation in the training of social care students.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school and trust their teachers to look after them. This view was also shared by all the parents who responded to the Parent View survey. Pupils have a good understanding of important aspects of safety, including how to make sure that they stay safe on the internet. They recognise the potential

dangers of cyber bullying but said that instances of any kind of bullying in their school are very rare.

## **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which was to see how effectively leaders were taking action to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This was an area of focus because assessment data at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2, in both 2016 and 2017, suggested that disadvantaged pupils were performing less well than their peers in school and other pupils nationally.
- Leaders were well aware of this issue and had carefully analysed previous assessment information to see what lessons could be learned. This analysis, confirmed by the school's tracking of the attainment and progress of current pupils, showed that many disadvantaged pupils also had other barriers to learning. This included a significant proportion of pupils who had special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- The school has worked hard to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils are well supported academically and pastorally. Tracking shows that most disadvantaged pupils are now making progress at the same rate as or more quickly than their classmates and are beginning to catch up with other pupils nationally. Those disadvantaged pupils who also have SEN and/or disabilities are progressing well from their own starting points.
- The second area of focus for the inspection was the progress that most-able pupils make during their time in key stage 2. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading was below the national average in 2016 and 2017 and below average in mathematics in 2017. A below-average proportion of pupils reached greater depth in writing in 2016.
- Leaders have responded decisively, building on the good outcomes achieved last year by pupils at the end of key stage 1 (current Year 3). They have ensured that teachers across key stage 2 have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and challenge pupils effectively so that more reach the higher standards. In reading, teachers use well-chosen, high-quality texts to develop pupils' comprehension skills and broaden their vocabulary. For example, the most able Year 6 pupils were seen very impressively identifying and discussing Shakespeare's use of imagery in 'Romeo and Juliet'.
- High-quality, focused teaching of small groups of most-able pupils across key stage 2 provides concentrated, challenging input in mathematics and English. Pupils' work in mathematics shows that teachers are challenging them to apply their mathematical skills to complex problems more regularly and effectively. The most able pupils in key stage 2 write well across a range of styles and use adventurous vocabulary particularly well. The school's tracking confirms that the most able pupils are now making faster progress and more are achieving at higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. It is, however, too soon for the impact of this work to be reflected in published assessment information.
- The final key line of enquiry focused on the quality and impact of phonics

teaching in key stage 1. Although they have improved steadily over time, pupils' scores in the phonics screening check in Years 1 and 2 have remained below average. This has also been an area of concern for leaders, who have sought external advice to help secure improvements in phonics outcomes. Some progress has been made. There is a clear approach to grouping pupils so that phonics teaching matches their ability, and regular checks are made on pupils' progress.

- The impact of these strategies has been hindered by a lack of clarity and coherence in the planning and delivery of phonics. Teachers and teaching assistants use a range of schemes and resources, which has the effect of creating inconsistency in pupils' learning. Although staff have been able to access regular training in phonics, this has not led to a single, consistent teaching approach. For some readers, the books available are not matched accurately enough to their specific phonic needs. Consequently, pupils who are struggling with phonics are not catching up quickly enough. The leader responsible for phonics accepts that this is the case and is determined to address the issue and improve outcomes in phonics.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater consistency in the planning, teaching and resourcing of phonics so that more pupils reach the expected standard
- they evaluate and build upon the successful actions that they have taken to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection I met with you, other school leaders and members of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I met a group of teaching and support staff and considered 26 responses to the staff survey. I considered 41 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including free-text comments. I met with a group of pupils and took account of 23 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I heard a number of pupils read. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.