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Mr John Fernandes
Headteacher
St Marie's School, A Catholic Voluntary Academy
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Dear Mr Fernandes

Short inspection of St Marie's School, A Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 8 June 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 the school was judged to be good in June 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, the deputy headteacher and governors lead with strong determination to provide pupils with a high-quality education that develops them as well-rounded individuals. You have created an incredibly nurturing and inclusive ethos. You are well supported by a positive staff team. They are keen to do their very best to provide pupils with a vibrant curriculum which interests and engages them and values them as individuals. Consequently pupils enjoy school, have good attitudes to learning and are considerate and caring towards each other.

By the end of early years, a greater proportion of pupils reach a good level of development than that seen nationally. Likewise, by the end of key stage 1, pupils attain standards which are above the national average. Pupils achieve highly in reading and mathematics in key stage 2. Progress in reading and mathematics was significantly above the national average in key stage 2 in 2016. Progress in writing was broadly in line with national figures but is beginning to show more-rapid improvement for current pupils. You are now keen to improve standards across the wider curriculum to match those seen in English and mathematics.

Since the last inspection there have been substantial changes to leadership and teaching staff. You and the deputy headteacher are new in post. In addition, 50% of the teaching staff are new and both the chair and vice-chair of governors are

new to their roles. You quickly recognised the need for more robust self-evaluation and have begun to develop effective systems to support you in achieving this. You acknowledge that the next step is for subject leaders to develop similar systems to enable them to be increasingly accountable for improving standards in their subjects. By developing the role of subject leaders, you are keen to strengthen leadership further and create more capacity for continued school improvement.

You have made positive strides in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection relating to improving the consistency of teaching further. However, as there have been changes to the national curriculum and to your staffing team, you have adapted the focus as necessary in order to continue improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You work closely with other professionals and services to ensure that children and families receive timely and effective support. The training staff receive means that they are effective in recognising and responding to signs of concern.

Pupils behave very well and say that there is rarely any bullying. They feel safe and well cared for in school and parents strongly agree. The curriculum provides countless opportunities to support children in being safe. Consequently, pupils talk confidently about how to stay safe online and what they would do if someone was being unkind to them at school.

Inspection findings

- You and the deputy headteacher carry out a range of checks on the quality of teaching and learning. This is beginning to give you a clearer picture of each teacher's strengths and areas for development and is helping to successfully identify whole-school training needs. You are keen to involve more leaders in carrying out these checks in order to further support school improvement and to develop middle leadership. You are currently developing your assessment system so that it provides you with more accurate and reliable information about pupils' attainment and progress. Regular pupil progress meetings have been critical to the continued improvements made to the quality of teaching. Teachers are now taking more ownership and responsibility for the progress that their pupils make. Where any gaps in learning are identified, teachers and leaders work together to plan how to best meet each pupil's needs. Intervention is, therefore, now directly targeting pupils' next steps and is having a positive impact on their progress.
- Pupils enjoy an interesting and broad curriculum which supports them in developing skills and knowledge in a purposeful way. You have ensured that the curriculum is enriched with visits and visitors which help to bring pupils' learning to life. Teachers select high-quality texts which are used to challenge pupils'

thinking. This is particularly effective in ensuring that the most able pupils receive effective challenge and provides meaningful links across a range of subjects. The topics studied often provide a context for pupils' writing. For example, following a global outdoor classroom day, pupils met their writing task with enthusiasm. The shared experience had given them lots of ideas to use in their writing. Teachers also adapt the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- You recognise that where subjects have been a focus in the school's improvement plan, such as science and outdoor learning, there is evidence of standards improving. However, in a variety of other subjects, assessment of standards and self-evaluation by leaders are not as well developed. You are now keen to introduce a rigorous cycle of self-evaluation to all subjects so that you can check the impact of leaders' actions on improving pupils' outcomes.
- Writing outcomes have been relatively weaker than those found in reading and mathematics over time. Progress in writing by the end of key stage 2 in 2016 was broadly in line with the national average, whereas in reading and mathematics, progress was significantly above average. You identified that boys were making less progress than girls. The subject leader for English took action and spoke to pupils to gather their views. The resulting inclusion of more competition and outdoor learning in the teaching of writing has had a positive impact on boys' attitudes. Leaders' actions to improve writing are just beginning to gather more pace and are starting to result in a quickening of progress for current pupils. Additionally, there is evidence that for disadvantaged pupils, the difference is diminishing between their attainment in writing and that of other pupils nationally. Leaders have therefore made sure that funding for this group of pupils has been well directed.
- You acknowledge that there could be greater rigour in school improvement planning. For example, the addition of milestones from which to check progress each term, rather than waiting until the end of the year, would support you and governors in checking the impact of leaders' actions.
- Pupils' attendance is above average overall and persistent absence is below the national average. However, disadvantaged pupils had attendance which was below average last year, at 95.5%. You have taken prompt action to address this. As a result of your thorough tracking and personalised approach to each case, attendance for disadvantaged pupils this year is currently 97.2%.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leadership is developed to include a rigorous cycle of self-evaluation so that leaders are able to take greater responsibility for school improvement and become more accountable for improving standards in their subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders, six members of the governing body and a representative from the Diocese of Hallam. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority on the telephone. I evaluated documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' progress, performance management information, governing body minutes, attendance records and information about safeguarding. I spoke with several parents at the start of the school day and considered the 92 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I met with a group of pupils from a range of year groups and spoke with a group of teaching staff. You and I visited every classroom together to observe teaching and learning, listen to pupils read and scrutinise pupils' work in books.