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Mrs Ann King  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Catholic Primary  
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Derbyshire  
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Dear Mrs King

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

Following my visit to the school on 15 February 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 September 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 are proud of the school that you lead. You said that the school ethos is critical and that all members of staff are committed to the development of the whole child. Parents and carers value the school highly. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, believe that their child is well taught, and happy at school. They would recommend your school to others.

The partnership with the Peak Edge Group of Schools (PEGS) is effective. The philosophy of this partnership, 'our sharing, caring community; stronger together' is one that you said is vital. This partnership has developed over time and has helped you to grow the capacity of the school. For example, staff are involved in many training opportunities. Pupils gain the chance to visit their peers in schools different to their own. Resources and ideas are shared. Your commitment to ensure that St Mary's Catholic Primary looks beyond its immediate surroundings to collaborate with others has ensured the continued development of the school.

Pupils learn in a calm, well-organised and stimulating environment. Every available space is used to promote learning. In classrooms, teachers use displays as a resource to help pupils to make progress. Displays also celebrate pupils' achievements. The school is awash with vibrant high-quality art. Learning takes place inside and also outside in the school forest and gardens. You make sure that

pupils have many opportunities to extend learning beyond the classroom, including in church and within the local community.

Pupils are welcomed into the school at the very start of the school day and settle quickly. Teachers make sure that learning begins as soon as pupils enter their classroom. Pupils said that they valued this start and that they relished the opportunity to get their 'brains working' as soon as possible. There is a real vibrancy to the learning environment in which pupils respond enthusiastically.

At the previous inspection, the inspector identified aspects of the early years that needed to improve further. Your response to this has been rapid. The early years leader has had a marked impact. The early years has improved. In 2017, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was well above the national average. Teachers now skilfully gather children's ideas and interests. These are then woven into learning plans. All areas of learning are considered and children experience a wide range of challenging activities. Children were keen to show the inspector the LS Lowry-inspired mural they had created and the additional work produced due to their interest in their town, New Mills. This inspired piece of work provoked much discussion and pride.

In a small school, caution is needed when interpreting the information about pupils' achievement. This is because the number of pupils is small and percentage figures can be skewed. Nevertheless, in 2017, some middle-ability pupils achieved less well than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. Their achievement at greater depth, however, was in line with average. Leaders' information and work in pupils' workbooks indicate that a greater proportion of middle-ability pupils will make the progress expected of them and reach the standard they should, in 2018.

You are focusing on improving pupils' writing. A clear, well-structured improvement plan is in place to address this. Teachers' assessment of pupils' writing has been externally checked and agreed. You told me that teachers had a much better understanding of the demands of the new curriculum. The actions taken to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar at both key stage 1 and 2 have been successful. Many pupils at each key stage write accurately and with fluency. They use language well to describe, inform and evoke atmosphere. However, we agreed that expectations for some pupils, particularly in key stage 2, are still not high enough. Some pupils' writing, particularly boys, can be careless. Opportunities to produce extended writing across a range of subjects is too infrequent.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The staff know the pupils and their families well. Parents value the care and support their children receive. All of the parents that responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that they felt their child is safe within school.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The safeguarding policy is up

to date. All staff receive high-quality training, including about the 'Prevent' duty and child sexual exploitation. New staff access a comprehensive induction programme that includes how to ensure pupils' safety and welfare. The recruitment of staff and subsequent record-keeping are well managed.

You said that you are absolutely committed to make sure that the information about the most vulnerable pupils is well managed. An electronic system has been implemented. Pupils receive the help they require promptly.

Pupils are overwhelming in their praise of the school. They said that they felt safe and that there are many people to whom they could turn if they needed help. Pupils said that 'falling out' was rare.

### **Inspection findings**

- Governors know the school well. They have a good understanding of the many strengths of the schools and the areas that need to improve further. Their work is focused on a smooth transition to academy status. The school is due to convert to become an academy as part of St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust (CMAT) in September 2018.
- Regular meetings between teachers and school leaders take place to check pupils' progress. Pupils receive additional support or more difficult work if they are not achieving as they should. You recognise that some information about pupils and groups of pupils requires further refinement in response to changes nationally. Plans are in place to address this.
- Pupils value their school. Attendance is better than the national average.
- Pupils behave in an exemplary fashion. They are polite and welcoming to each other and to visitors. Since the previous inspection, no pupil has been excluded from the school. Many said that they felt lucky to be a pupil at St Mary's.
- 'Special friends' is popular with pupils. Older pupils have the important duty of being a special point of contact for younger children. Year 6 pupils said that they took this responsibility very seriously and they valued the opportunity to provide help, support and friendship. Parents said that the way in which pupils helped and looked after each other was a special feature of the school.
- The teaching of phonics is a particular strength of the school. All pupils achieved the expected standard in phonics in 2016 and 2017 in Year 1. The early years lead, also the phonics teacher, ensures that pupils are ready for their next stage in education.
- All those that responded to Ofsted's survey of school staff commented that they were proud to work at St Mary's Catholic Primary School.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that pupils, particularly boys, learn the skills they need to write confidently at the level their starting points indicate they should
- refine the information the school collects about the progress pupils, and groups of pupils, make so that leaders can get an accurate picture of the impact of the quality of teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your senior leadership team and members of the governing body, including the chair. I met with a group of Year 6 pupils and spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I considered the views of 35 parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 35 responses to Ofsted's free-text service and 14 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupils' survey. Together with the headteacher and English lead, I conducted a scrutiny of Year 6 pupils work across a range of subjects studied. We toured the school and visited every classroom. I visited the early years and observed the indoor and outdoor provision for pupils. I evaluated a range of documents, including leaders' self-evaluation, development planning, safeguarding records and policies. Together, we discussed and reviewed documentation relating to the PEGS partnership.