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Ms Olga O'Beirne  
Principal  
St Mary's Catholic Primary School  
Mill Street  
Brierley Hill  
West Midlands  
DY5 2TH

Dear Ms O'Beirne

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

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 October 2011.

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

Along with other school leaders, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been many changes at the school since the last inspection. You joined the school as principal in September 2014, shortly before the school converted to an academy by joining Saint Nicholas Owen Catholic Multi Academy Company. The governing body, now known as the academy committee, has been reformed and there have been several changes in staffing. Over the last three years, you have secured the confidence of everyone linked to the school. They agree that you are determined to provide the very best education for all your pupils. Parents are supportive and describe the school as family orientated. The great majority would recommend the school to others. As one parent wrote, 'This school offers a truly wonderful setting for any child entering into their educational journey.'

Pupils talk positively about school, and relationships between pupils and adults are strong. Pupils generally behave well and they said that the school's behaviour policy, which is understood by all, is applied fairly. As they get older, pupils have increased opportunities to take on responsibilities, for example, as peer mentors, faith leaders and school council representatives. These opportunities help to prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to ensure that lessons contain a suitable level of challenge for all pupils. Evidence gathered during this inspection, shows that teaching generally meets the needs of all pupils because teachers adapt

activities or the amount of support available. Pupils are interested in their lessons and, because the work is set at the right level, they can see the progress that they are making. As a result, the majority of pupils are working at the level expected for their age and more pupils are working at the higher standard in a range of subjects.

Since the last inspection, the roles of subject and other leaders have developed. Leaders now have a greater responsibility for improving pupils' progress across the school. The curriculum and the school's systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress have also been revised, and both aspects of the school's work are better. Together, these actions are beginning to have a positive impact on securing stronger outcomes for all pupils. As a result of increased expectations within the curriculum, and a number of new teachers, you recognise the need to ensure that assessment information is accurate and consistent and that it is used effectively by all teachers.

You have taken action to improve the teaching of writing, and outcomes in English grammar, punctuation and spelling are strong. However, the quality and quantity of pupils' written work can vary between subjects. This is an area that you have identified as needing further improvement.

In mathematics, you have introduced a calculation policy, which has resulted in greater consistency in the methods that pupils are using to perform calculations. Teachers are also sharper at moving pupils onto more challenging activities, and little time is wasted. As a result, more pupils are working at the level expected for their age across the school. You have identified that pupils need more regular opportunities to improve their reasoning skills and to apply their knowledge and understanding to solving mathematical problems.

You and your staff recognised that pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were not achieving as well as other pupils in school. You have taken decisive action to address this shortcoming. As a result, you have raised the profile of vulnerable pupils across the school. There is now a broad range of approaches in place to support these pupils and maximise their learning, including providing good support to meet pupils' social and emotional needs. You use additional funding effectively to support pupils' needs. This work is having a positive impact on pupils' rates of progress. However, there are still differences in outcomes, especially for disadvantaged pupils, and so this remains a key area for further development.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is an extensive culture of safeguarding in the school. You and your safeguarding team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. As a result, pupils are well cared for at all times. Pupils know that the adults in school are there to look after them. Pupils said that they feel safe in school and that they are taught how to stay safe, for example, when using the internet.

All staff have regular and appropriate child protection and 'Prevent' duty training to enable them to understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe from harm. Staff are clear about what they should do if they have any safeguarding concerns. You are persistent when there are concerns about a pupil's welfare, and work with external agencies as necessary. You have a good understanding of the specific safeguarding concerns that relate to the context of the school. Members of the academy committee understand their role in overseeing the effectiveness of safeguarding and do so with rigour.

### **Inspection findings**

- Over the last year, you have refined your approach to assessing and tracking pupils' progress. This has raised everyone's expectations and brought about a greater focus on ensuring that all pupils make good progress. Staff are now using the available information to ensure that their planning and the use of any additional resources are closely matched to pupils' specific needs. The accuracy of your assessment system is suitably checked when teachers in school, the multi academy company and local schools meet to compare outcomes and standards. You are now confident in the judgements made by your experienced staff. New members of staff will receive any support that they require to maintain the high levels of consistency.
- At the end of Reception Year, the proportion of children attaining the expected standard has improved over time and is now in line with national outcomes. This is because assessment is now more rigorous and there is a greater focus on addressing the needs of individual children. The curriculum is also adapted to engage the children's interests, especially the boys, through topics such as dinosaurs and superheroes. There is a strong focus on developing the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics through activities in both the indoor and outdoor learning environments.
- There is now a consistent approach to teaching phonics and reading across the school. In Year 1, most pupils reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2017, and outcomes were in line with those seen nationally. Pupils use their phonics skill to decode unknown words, and they are developing understanding and fluency appropriate for their age and ability. In key stage 2, there is a greater focus on teaching the skills of reading comprehension. Teachers' expectations have increased for all pupils, particularly the most able. Provisional key stage 2 reading outcomes for 2017 indicate that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was greater than the national average, as was the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard.
- A significant minority of your pupils have a first language other than English and join the school with varying levels of English language skills. You provide effective support for them so that by the end of key stage 2 their outcomes are broadly similar to all pupils nationally.
- While overall pupils' attendance was higher than the national average in 2016, attendance for pupils who have free school meals was in the lowest 10% nationally. Information for the current year shows that overall attendance for this group remains below that for all pupils. As a result, you are rightly focusing on

strategies to improve attendance for these pupils. The importance of attending regularly and on time has a high profile in school. You recognise and reward pupils who have good attendance on a regular basis. You track the attendance of individual pupils and contact parents when attendance drops below an acceptable level. The procedures that you and your staff follow, including contacting parents on the first day of absence and working with external agencies, help to ensure that pupils are safe and not at risk of going missing from education.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strategies to support disadvantaged pupils are embedded and further developed in order to maximise their progress
- assessment processes and information tracking systems are used consistently and effectively across the school
- pupils' written work is of a consistently high standard when pupils are writing independently and at length across a range of subjects
- developments to raise standards in mathematics focus on improving pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy committee, the chair of the board of directors for the multi academy company, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Crooks  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant principal, the special educational needs coordinator and members of staff, including two subject coordinators, a newly qualified teacher and two teaching assistants. I met with the chair of the academy committee and two representatives from the board of directors of the multi academy company. I talked with parents at the start of the day and with pupils both formally and informally.

Together, we visited the majority of classes where we observed teaching and learning and spoke to pupils, and I heard a sample of pupils read. We looked at the work in some books, including a sample of books from last academic year. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I scrutinised several

documents including your school self-evaluation, improvement plans, assessment information and documents relating to safeguarding.

I took account of 14 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also took account of three responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.