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Mrs Margaret Yates
Executive Headteacher
St Maria Goretti Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Yates

Short inspection of St Maria Goretti Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your head of school and the assistant headteachers have high expectations of yourselves, of teachers and of pupils, creating an aspirational learning environment for all. Interwoven with the drive for all pupils to achieve their potential is the care and concern for pupils and their families which ensure all have the help they need. As a result, pupils and parents are very positive about the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and enjoy learning. They have great trust in each other and their teachers to help them when they need it, and to celebrate with them when they achieve in the many different ways available to them.

Since the school converted to academy status in 2013, you have worked effectively to build on existing strengths and to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have maintained a focus on further improving teaching and raising achievement through well-planned professional development, which is much appreciated by staff. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together to plan learning that meets the needs of pupils and to support them to become independent in applying the skills they learn. As a national leader of education, you ensure that good practice is developed and shared within the school, across the multi-academy trust and beyond. You achieve this, for instance, through the support of specialist leaders of education employed by the school, who also serve the local teaching alliance.

One of the areas for further improvement identified at the previous inspection was to provide more focused support for able pupils within mathematics, to ensure they are challenged. As a result, you have required all teachers to plan for different levels of challenge within their lessons to meet the needs of different abilities. During visits to classrooms, including those where mathematics was being taught, I saw this in action. Work was well matched to pupils' needs, so that the less able pupils were able to secure the skill and understanding required, and the most able moved on quickly to more challenging work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping pupils safe and secure is central to the school's work. Every member of staff takes their responsibility for safeguarding seriously and you have ensured that robust systems and procedures are in place to enable rapid and effective responses where required. The school's safeguarding and child protection team is meticulous in following up even minor concerns identified by teachers, working with outside agencies as well as parents, to ensure that pupils are protected from harm. The designated safeguarding lead ensures that timely referrals are made to appropriate authorities where necessary. She keeps detailed records for every child, which are held securely and reviewed regularly to ensure that actions taken are having a positive effect. Consequently, pupils are safe and feel safe, and their parents agree.

Pupils say that bullying almost never happens and that even name-calling is rare. They were able to differentiate between bullying and 'falling out' and felt confident that, if ever they did feel intimidated, they could speak to any adult in the school, or to pupil mediators. Many pupils spoke about the 'Time to Talk' areas in their classrooms, which could be used to reflect on their own behaviour, or that of others, to think about how behaviours can be changed to make everybody happy. Indeed, the school has a notably happy atmosphere, both during lessons and at break times. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school because they like learning and they like being with people who care about them.

Inspection findings

- Governance through the board of directors and at local level is effective because there is a good balance of support and challenge. Governors at all levels know the school well. The system of link governors, through the academy committee, ensures that governors have a first-hand knowledge of standards in the school, as well as the information provided by the regular reports from you, senior leaders and middle leaders. They have a good understanding of how funding is spent and the impact it is having on raising standards. Governors are recruited carefully to ensure that roles and responsibilities are well matched to experience.
- Since the last inspection, when the leadership team was in its infancy, you have successfully developed a very effective leadership model. Leaders at all levels work well together to ensure that there is a common drive for continuous improvement based on the robust systems and procedures you

have developed. These have enabled the sharp focus on pupils' progress that is central to the school's work.

- You have ensured that pupils receive consistently good teaching. For instance, you have ensured that all teachers now support pupils to practise and apply their literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects. Moreover, your specialist leaders of education, who have developed this approach, have successfully supported other schools to develop similar strategies to improve their teaching.
- You and your leaders have provided an effective assessment framework to underpin the delivery of the new curriculum. This allows you to check the progress of every pupil in every subject on a frequent basis and to identify any weaknesses. Careful analysis of barriers that may be slowing progress ensure that actions taken are swift and matched to need. This ensures that nearly all pupils make good progress over time.
- Teachers are using assessment information well to plan learning that challenges pupils of all abilities. For example, in Year 6, pupils are offered different levels of challenge at bronze, silver and gold. The teacher then makes sure that the most able pupils complete the most challenging work. This has improved the attainment of the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, and is beginning to have a positive effect on accelerating the progress of this group. For instance, provisional results for 2016 show that the proportion of pupils with high prior attainment who achieved the higher standard, was at least as good as found nationally and often better.
- A significant proportion of children join the early years with skills and understanding much lower than those typically expected for their age. The creative and highly effective leadership of this phase ensures that children make rapid progress. Classroom and outdoor spaces are arranged to help children access carefully organised and structured activities independently. Language is everywhere, so that even those children who arrive at the school in the early stages of language acquisition are encouraged to explain what they are doing and why, using the correct words and linking these to the written labels all around them. As a result, the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year is consistently above that seen nationally. Disadvantaged pupils in the school achieve better than other pupils nationally and the difference between them and others in the school has diminished.
- You identified that, historically, pupils' progress in writing has not been as rapid as in other subjects. You have addressed this by reviewing the curriculum to ensure that writing skills are practised and applied across all subjects. The introduction of a weekly extended writing task has enabled teachers to check very regularly whether writing is improving as a result. 2016 outcomes suggest that this is the case. However, on occasion the school's expectations of what constitutes 'extended' writing are not high enough, particularly for the most able. Moreover, pupils' handwriting in some year groups is of variable quality, and not enough attention is being given to improving this aspect of writing.
- In 2015, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 was below the national average. You took the decision to extend the early years model of learning to

key stage 1, in order to better address the often-complex needs of pupils. The impact of this has been very positive as, this year, provisional test results show that the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard was in line with national outcomes in reading and mathematics, and above national outcomes in writing. Although differences in attainment remain between disadvantaged pupils and others, these are diminishing and there is very clear evidence that they diminish further as pupils move through the school.

- In 2016, pupils' achievement at the end of Year 6 was above the national average. Rates of progress overall are in line with, or above, the national average. Pupils who speak English as an additional language made excellent progress from their starting points. However, you have identified that, although rates of progress for the most able continue to improve, these pupils are not yet achieving as well as they could. You are keen to address this and have clear and appropriate plans to do so.
- Very rigorous monitoring of pupil progress in all year groups is ensuring that rapid action is taken to support the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which are often combined with other complex needs. However, the school's own information shows that, although these pupils do make up lost ground as barriers to learning are successfully addressed, progress from their starting points is not yet as good as that of other pupils in the school in some year groups.
- The school's work to improve attendance has been very successful. You have established stringent procedures, creating a very effective family support team, and investing time and resources in working intensively with parents. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent and overall attendance that is above the national average.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is uniformly good. They take a lively interest in both learning and play. They enjoy the numerous activities they have access to during lunchtime, demonstrating their ability to play together harmoniously, share equipment and help one another in developing skills such as hula-hooping and ball skills.
- The school provides an extensive extended curriculum which benefits all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, through providing additional experiences to improve their life skills. For instance, pupils have had great success in public speaking activities following the school's introduction of English speaking examinations and weekly opportunities for debates. They take enormous pride in their achievements and are confident in their ability to express themselves and their ideas, as a result.
- The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school. They describe teachers and leaders as approachable and willing to 'go the extra mile' to help their children. Several cited the frequent parent workshops that enable them to support their children's learning as examples of how the school works in close partnership with parents.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the current successful strategies to support the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are further developed, so that these pupils make progress in line with that found nationally for all pupils
- the additional challenge now in place for the most able pupils is sustained across all year groups and subjects
- pupils' handwriting is improved so that writing is clear and legible.

I am copying this letter to the board of directors, the director of education for the archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stoke-on-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you, the head of school and the two assistant headteachers. I also met with class teachers, pupils, parents, governors, a board director and spoke on the telephone with the chair of the academy committee.

I discussed the work of the school with you, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding pupils. I visited all classrooms with one of your assistant headteachers. During these visits, I spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work they had completed in their books. I also met with a group of pupils to gather their views about the school, and listened to pupils read from Year 2 and Year 6. I also took into account information from questionnaires completed by 18 staff and 33 parents.

I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and plans for development, assessment information, school policies, including those for safeguarding pupils, child protection records, as well as documents about the use and impact of government funding.

During this short inspection I tested four lines of enquiry:

- the extent to which differences in achievement between groups of children in the early years have reduced
- the extent to which leaders and teachers are improving attainment in key stage 1, particularly in reading and for disadvantaged pupils

- the impact of the school's actions to accelerate the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able, including those who are disadvantaged
- the effectiveness of leaders' actions to sustain improved attendance and further reduce persistent absence.