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Mr Gary Hall
Headteacher
St James-the-Less Roman Catholic Primary School, Rawtenstall
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Dear Mr Hall

Short inspection of St James-the-Less Roman Catholic Primary School, Rawtenstall

Following my visit to the school on 26 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The leadership team and governors have stabilised staffing, despite a staffing restructure, which was beyond their control. You and the acting deputy headteacher understand the school well and your evaluations are based on strong evidence. You use this information to produce school-improvement plans that will help to move the school forward.

There have been many improvements since the previous inspection. The breadth of the curriculum is strong. Pupils have a wide range of opportunities, including music, art, physical education, sports and computing. However, you recognise that pupils' knowledge about wider world cultures is limited and are working to address this. Subject leaders are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They understand what makes effective teaching in their subjects. Leaders work together as a team to make sure that teachers cover all aspects of the national curriculum. Subject leaders analyse what pupils know and understand in their subjects. This is proving useful in identifying key actions to drive further improvement.

You and your team have taken effective action to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Your clear and determined focus on boys' development has been effective. As a result, they are making much better progress than at the time of the previous inspection. Boys enjoy writing and are keen to

share their skills, particularly in key stage 1.

Teachers' clear explanations ensure that pupils know what adults expect of them in the lesson. Teachers ensure that pupils know what to do to improve their work, through ongoing checks of what pupils know and can do. For example, teachers use effective questioning to make sure that pupils have understood what they have been taught. However, this is not carried out consistently well across all classes.

Your focus on boys' outcomes means that a greater proportion of middle-attaining boys are reaching the higher standards at key stage 1. You acknowledge that fewer middle-attaining girls are making the same high rates of progress as boys, particularly in mathematics. You also acknowledge that in writing, in key stage 1, the most able pupils are not challenged enough to make consistently strong progress.

Leaders and governors have recognised the decline in children's outcomes at the end of the Reception Year. Children start school with skills and abilities that are broadly typical for their age. However, this does vary. You acknowledge that more needs to be done to increase the rate of progress for those children who start school with skills and abilities below those typical for their age.

Pupils behave well at all times. Disruption in lessons is rare. Your Christian values are evident in the care and consideration pupils that show towards one another and towards adults. Pupils say 'good morning', hold doors open and ask about other people's well-being. You live out your mission statement and pupils are 'safe and secure in this friendly Catholic school'.

Parents speak highly of the school. They value the communication they receive and the way you encourage them to be part of the school. One said, 'There has never been a day when my child hasn't wanted to come to school.' A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the way in which the school reports on pupils' progress during the year. Inspection findings were that parents have opportunities to speak to staff twice a year, parents are invited into school regularly and annual reports to them are comprehensive.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective. The governors ensure that all policies and procedures are in place, of high quality and fit for purpose, including checks on teachers and governors. Training for staff is comprehensive and up to date. All adults know the pupils well and are vigilant to any signs that there may be a concern. Staff report any concerns to you and you follow these up swiftly. You ensure that all concerns have a satisfactory resolution.

Inspection findings

- Pupils benefit from good teaching at all levels. Staff use their good subject knowledge to ensure that teaching is matched to pupils' needs. Consequently, most pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or

disabilities, make good progress from their starting points across a range of subjects.

- A key line of enquiry for this inspection was about the outcomes for children at the end of the Reception Year.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has declined over several years. Provisional data for 2017 suggests that this proportion is now just below national averages. Leaders have looked at ways to improve this, particularly around developing early skills for writing. Teachers provide opportunities for children to work with small equipment, such as beads, to improve the way in which they handle small objects. However, adults do not provide sufficient opportunities for children to write or see others writing.
- Teachers work closely with feeder nurseries and parents to ensure a smooth start to school. Adults take children's individual needs, likes and dislikes into account when planning initial activities. As a result, children settle quickly when they first start school.
- Teachers understand the needs of the children and work out any extra support that children might need to help them to catch up with their peers. However, this is not yet fully effective in enabling the majority of children to reach a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year.
- You have made recent changes to the staff in the Reception class. It is too early to see the impact of this.
- Lower-ability children do not make rapid enough progress in the early years, particularly in writing. This does not enable those children who start school with skills and abilities below those typical for their age to catch up with their peers.
- Teachers and other adults regularly check on what children know and can do. They match these checks to the milestones for children's development. Adults use this information to aid future planning.
- Teachers invite parents to regular stay-and-play sessions to see how well their children are doing. Leaders have recently developed systems to involve parents more in assessing what their child knows and can do.
- Another line of enquiry was about leaders' actions to improve the rate of progress of pupils, particularly girls, in key stage 1. The progress of pupils in mathematics at key stage 1 is improving. Data for 2016 and provisional data for 2017 show that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in mathematics is above that seen nationally. The proportion reaching the higher standard is in line with that seen nationally. Boys make stronger progress than girls do and more boys reach the higher standards. Middle-attaining girls make at least expected progress in mathematics in key stage 1, but do not make fast enough progress to reach the higher standards.
- Leaders have ensured that since the previous inspection there has been a greater focus on problem-solving and investigation in mathematics. As a result, more pupils at key stage 2 are reaching the higher standards in mathematics. However, there has been less impact at key stage 1, particularly for girls.
- In writing, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards and the

higher standards in writing at key stage 1 are above the national averages. The progress of pupils currently in key stage 1 shows this trend is continuing. This is due to teachers' good subject knowledge and effective teaching. However, the most able pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable. In key stage 2, the most able pupils make much stronger progress in writing, and some are beginning to write with flair, for example, 'Shaking in desperation, Daniel's fingers ripped the curtain aside.'

- I also looked at how effectively governors carry out their statutory duties, particularly in relation to disadvantaged pupils. Governors are very ambitious for the school and have the children at the heart of what they do. Governors receive high-quality information from all leaders about the work of the school, and in particular about pupils' achievements. Governors appreciate the quality of this information.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for further improvement. This is because of your clear plans for future development.
- Governors constantly reflect on their own performance. As a result, they never stand still with their own development. They have a good understanding of their responsibilities and make sure that there are governors with the skills necessary to fulfil all duties.
- Published and internal school data suggests that disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as other pupils nationally. However, half of the disadvantaged pupils also have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Current disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their different starting points.
- The absence rates of disadvantaged pupils have varied over the past four years. In 2016, a high proportion of these pupils were regularly absent. This was due to specific problems for a minority of pupils. Leaders promote good attendance through weekly, termly and annual attendance rewards. Where attendance dips, leaders work with families to improve this, including collecting pupils to bring them to school. Where this approach does not work, leaders and governors are not afraid to take action.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Outcomes for children at the end of the Reception Year continue to improve by:
 - ensuring that standards in reading and writing in the early years improve for all groups of children
 - involving parents more in sharing what their child knows and can do
 - ensuring that children who start school with skills and abilities below those typical for their age catch up quickly with their peers.
- Middle-attaining pupils in key stage 1 make rapid progress in mathematics towards the higher standards by:

- providing opportunities to solve problems and investigate numbers
- making mathematics appealing to girls.

■ The most able pupils in key stage 1 make strong progress in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team, teachers and governors. I spoke with representative from the local authority. You and I visited classes to observe learning and looked at work in pupils' books. I met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with four parents in the playground before school. I considered the 42 responses and the 40 free-text comments made by parents on the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I heard several pupils read and observed pupils in the playground and in the dining hall.

I conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking on the school's policies, procedures and record-keeping. I talked with you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. I also considered a range of other documentation, including school-improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.