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Mr R Coakley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Coakley

Short inspection of St Mark's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 September 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 January 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

St Mark's is a nurturing and happy school where pupils behave well and work hard. Pupils are polite to visitors and get on well with each other and the adults who teach them. Along with other school leaders, including governors, you have sustained many of the school's strengths, including the positive and welcoming ethos. However, there are some areas that require further improvement. Teachers in the early years do not use assessment information effectively to ensure that children are consistently challenged in their learning. Furthermore, pupils' attendance remains below the national average and pupils do not achieve well in writing. You have also not ensured that the effectiveness of teaching in subjects beyond English and mathematics is evaluated thoroughly.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They value the care, guidance and support which their children receive and the positive relationships that they have with members of staff. One parent commented via Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire: 'It is a fantastic school that has a very strong community feel and a Christian heart. It is entirely focused on the child and the progress they can make both academically and socially.'

At the previous inspection, you were asked to raise standards in reading, writing

and mathematics. You were also asked to improve leadership and management, by reviewing and improving the effectiveness of the curriculum, especially in mathematics and reading. You have had some success at addressing these issues. Outcomes have improved in mathematics, and many pupils now make strong progress across key stage 2 in this subject. Pupils are also making better progress in reading, and the provisional results for 2018 show that the proportion achieving the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 has risen significantly. However, you have not been successful in improving outcomes in writing. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 was similar to the 2017 figure, which was below the national average. Few pupils were judged to be working at greater depth. Furthermore, the teaching of the curriculum beyond English and mathematics does not develop pupils' writing effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at St Mark's. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding policies meet current requirements, and that appropriate checks are made on all adults who work with children at the school. Safeguarding records are detailed and show that the school works effectively with outside agencies, where appropriate, to support vulnerable pupils and families. All members of staff are trained to an appropriate level and receive regular safeguarding updates. Staff are aware of their role in keeping pupils safe and have undertaken training on the 'Prevent' duty. Governors are also fully aware of the school's safeguarding responsibilities and make regular checks to ensure that agreed procedures are followed.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They said that staff help them to learn what to do, and how to stay safe, in different situations. For example, in Year 5, pupils learn about road safety through the 'Bikeability' programme, which helps them to develop the skills and knowledge required to ride confidently on roads. The Year 6 pupils that I spoke to told me how they learn to stay safe when using the internet. They also showed a good understanding of the different forms of bullying. They told me that bullying rarely happens at St Mark's and that they have confidence in staff to quickly resolve any problems of this kind.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on several agreed lines of enquiry. The first one that I explored was the quality of provision in the early years. This is because the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been below the national average in recent years.
- There are many strengths in the early years. Staff provide a well-organised and stimulating learning environment for children, both indoors and outside. There are excellent relationships between staff and parents and carers. Parents value the close interaction they have with school. Staff have developed comprehensive transition arrangements which help to ensure that children get off to a good start in the early years. As a result, children quickly learn school routines and develop positive attitudes to learning. Staff make regular observations of children and

keep a close check on their progress. However, the assessments that staff make are not used well enough to ensure that children are set work that challenges them consistently. Consequently, children do not make the progress of which they are capable in the early years.

- My second line of enquiry focused on pupils' attendance. This is because rates of absence were higher than the national averages in 2016 and 2017. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has also been too high during this period and rose significantly in 2017. You have strengthened your strategies for monitoring and improving attendance. You constantly stress the importance of good attendance to parents and have introduced a range of initiatives to reward pupils for good attendance. Staff are meticulous in following up any absence, and the learning mentor works closely to support the parents of those pupils whose attendance is causing concern. These actions led to improvements during the last school year. Overall attendance was higher and there was a reduction in the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent from school. However, despite these improvements, overall attendance remains below the national average and you recognise that further work is needed in this area.
- The third line of enquiry explored how well writing is taught across the school. I looked at the quality of work in pupils' books in English and subjects in the wider curriculum. I saw evidence of some pupils making strong progress across the previous academic year in their English books. However, in some year groups there were too few opportunities for pupils to write at length or for different purposes. As a result, progress for these pupils was not as strong, and I saw little evidence of pupils making fast progress and/or attaining the higher standard in writing.
- I found significant variation in the quality of pupils' writing in science, geography, and history. In many classes, pupils have few opportunities to develop their writing skills in these subjects, and teachers' expectations regarding handwriting and presentation are too low. These weaknesses were not known to school leaders as they had not made checks on pupils' work in the wider curriculum during the previous school year. School leaders have recognised that improvements need to be made to the teaching of the wider curriculum. To this end, leaders have prioritised the development of subject leadership for the current academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff make better use of assessment in the early years to set work that regularly challenges children and moves them on in their learning
- further improvements are made to overall attendance and there is a reduction in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school
- pupils make better progress in developing their writing skills in English and subjects across the curriculum

- effective systems are developed to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the wider curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the two early years leaders. I met with five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I spoke with representatives of the local authority and the Archdiocese of Liverpool. I visited all classrooms with you to observe teaching and learning and spent time looking at the quality of work in pupils' books from the last school year. I spoke with a group of Year 6 pupils about various aspects of school life and observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at dinner time. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, safeguarding information and the school improvement plan. I spoke to several parents in the playground before school and took account of the 18 responses to Parent View.