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Mrs Anne Charnley
Headteacher
St Clare's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Charnley

Short inspection of St Clare's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 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 St Clare's was judged to be good in March 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 are establishing a culture of ambition while maintaining the school's high standards of achievement. Your focus is on what is best for the children and families you serve, underpinned by your strong belief in equality of opportunity for all. You care about your staff and provide a good balance of support alongside raised expectations.

Pupils are taught well, achieve well and behave well in lessons and at social times. Parents are fulsome in their praise for the school. One parent commented: 'I feel very strongly that this is an excellent school with great leadership and fantastic, approachable, caring teachers.'

Since the previous inspection, high standards have been maintained across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Leaders, managers and governors are acutely aware of areas where progress could be even better, for example in the early years. They have a clear and incisive improvement plan in place.

Areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been addressed. Extended writing is taught well, and lots of care is taken over marking to ensure that the school's policy is consistently applied; pupils are told precisely what to improve. There is much captivating teaching, particularly in Years 2 and 6. In these

classes no learning time is lost; lessons are fun and engaging. Subject leaders have developed their scrutiny of teaching and the profile of these roles continues to grow.

Governors have continued to drive school improvement well, particularly in their appointment of a strong headteacher and deputy headteacher to replace two very successful and long-standing senior leaders. However, governors have not paid as much attention to the review of school policies and the government's requirements for the publication of information on schools' websites.

The school intake has changed considerably since the previous inspection and there are many more pupils who speak English as an additional language. They make good progress. However, White British boys do not make as much progress as their peers through key stage 1 and particularly in the early years. This is because they are not always engaged by the curriculum.

My scrutiny of performance management documents showed that while teachers' standards are being met, senior leaders' expectations of those on the upper pay-scale are not always high enough.

Reading is taught well and previous weaknesses in the teaching of phonics have been addressed, leading to very good results. Although pupils are confident to decode words, they are not always as adept at understanding what they have read. School leaders rightly recognise that there needs to be a greater focus on comprehension, particularly for the most able pupils who often read independently.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers, including governors, are well focused on the achievement of all pupils in their school. This is why high standards have been maintained since the previous inspection. Pupils leave the school having achieved standards above the national average. The most able pupils achieve well by the end of key stage 2 and the proportion of pupils achieving the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics is consistently well in excess of the national averages.
- Governors are highly ambitious for pupils in the school, for whom they have very high expectations. They make themselves available to parents through school events and seek parents' views through regular questionnaires. Governors have a very good understanding of pupils' achievement but they have not paid the same attention to the review of some of the school's policies and the government's requirements for the school website.
- Leaders and managers are focusing on developing a more creative curriculum. This was evident in Years 1 and 2 where pupils thoroughly enjoyed discussing and writing about 'The Gruffalo'. The work was well planned to engage all pupils, and they particularly enjoyed performing the text through a finger puppet theatre.
- Writing is taught well and scrutiny of Year 6 books showed some very high-quality extended writing. Pupils write accurately and fluently due to their well-embedded reading and spelling skills. There is a good range of reading books

available to them. Pupils read regularly and say that they enjoy the books. Some say that they read 'for fun'.

- Pupils behave extremely well. They are polite and respectful to each other, as well as to adults and visitors. Pupils report that behaviour in lessons is good and any rare interruption to learning would be dealt with swiftly by 'a look' from the teacher. Lunchtimes are well organised and well supervised. Many pupils say they enjoy school lunches. There is a successful 'buddy' system where Year 6 pupils link with and look after those children who are new to school. All groups of pupils have good attendance at school and very few are late.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well because they are very well supported. There are strong relationships between staff who provide support for individual pupils' needs. This is indicative of the caring and inclusive ethos.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is promoted well and there are very thought-provoking spiritual displays in the main hall which explore Christian values such as forgiveness. Pupils make the most of the school's running track to raise money for charity and are able to express their views through the school council. Pupils spoken to by the inspector said that they enjoyed 'peaceful prayer time', when they had the opportunity to lead quiet reflection with pupils from other classes.
- The curriculum is enriched by a number of sports clubs. Older pupils have the opportunity to go away for a week with their teachers and friends to an outdoor pursuits centre. Pupils say that they particularly enjoy tag rugby, even though they get very muddy!
- Children in the early years have access to an extensive and very well-kept outdoor area in which to play and learn. The school invests well in transition to the secondary school as the children attend six 'settling in sessions' in September.
- I observed children in the early years behaving well and most were engaged in counting activities on the carpet. However, as the activity progressed some children, particularly the most able, lost interest. This is because they could already confidently count to 20. Not enough use was made of the teaching assistant to help provide a suitable level of challenge for all children. White British boys were not as engaged as their peers and did not make good enough progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Systems are in place for staff to receive regular updates around safeguarding. All staff are appropriately trained to spot the signs of abuse and systems are established for pupils to report if they are experiencing problems or bullying. The school has rightly recognised that safeguarding could be further strengthened by creating different ways for pupils to report problems if they feel unable to speak to a member of staff.

The very few issues of child protection that occur are followed up diligently, with

clear and well-organised records kept. You are the designated person for child protection and are confidently adept at accessing support from a range of agencies to support pupils who are in need. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and almost all parents agree. A very small minority of parents feel that the very few instances of bullying are not always dealt with as effectively as they should be. However, procedures for dealing with bullying are robust.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- accelerate the achievement of White British boys in early years
- tighten up procedures for performance management for all staff, particularly for teachers on the upper payscale
- improve the teaching of comprehension, particularly for the most able pupils.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the deputy headteacher, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body. I observed the before-school club, and teaching in all key stages. I spoke with staff and pupils at social times, listened to pupils read and scrutinised reading records and writing books. I analysed the single central record, records of child protection, and we looked at aspects of safeguarding together. I scrutinised the school website, school policies, self-evaluation documentation and school improvement planning. I spoke with approximately 20 parents. I considered the 10 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including a number of free text comments made by parents.