

1 February 2019

Mrs Ruth Culley  
Interim Head of School  
St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School  
Pilch Lane  
Liverpool  
Merseyside  
L14 0JG

Dear Mrs Culley

### **Short inspection of St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019, 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 December 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The headteacher has been absent since September and the school is currently led by yourself, with the support of the interim executive headteacher. The two of you have quickly established a good working relationship. You are supported by two acting assistant headteachers who have a very firm command of the key information on the school. Together, you have succeeded in gaining the support of the staff who told me that, through your leadership and the strong teamwork among colleagues, continuity is being maintained and there is a good spirit in the school. This was borne out by the responses to the staff questionnaire which were generally very positive. Parents and carers also confirmed that continuity is being maintained. A typical comment was: 'School life is flourishing as ever and this is a credit to the teachers/TAs and senior management team... They are doing a great job!'

There is a strong commitment to building on and continuing the improvements made since the last inspection. Your self-evaluation is precise and based on a thorough analysis of data and other information. It celebrates the school's successes but also identifies its weaker aspects. The school development plan identifies the right priorities for improvement and gives a clear indication of the actions that will be taken to achieve well-defined goals.

The governors are able and committed. Through regular visits to the school, examination of work, and discussions with staff and pupils, they keep themselves well informed about developments. They have been closely involved in producing

the school's self-evaluation and development plan and have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. They provide leaders with an appropriate balance of support and challenge.

The great majority of parents are very positive about the standard of behaviour in the school, as are the staff and the pupils. Behaviour around the school is good and in lessons the great majority of pupils concentrate well. They relate well to each other and to adults and visitors, and show respect for the school environment. This is very attractive and kept to a high standard of repair and cleanliness. The pupils enjoy the rich variety of activities offered to them, not only in lessons but through the extra-curricular programme. The strong focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has a positive impact on pupils' attitudes.

After the last inspection, the school conducted a radical review of its curriculum. As a result, there is now an increased emphasis on ensuring that pupils are given experiences and opportunities that might not otherwise be available to them. Thus, for example, every year group visits the theatre and presents its own play production. Pupils also attend professional musical concerts and present their own concerts. They also receive visits from the police, other public services and theatre groups, to raise their awareness of local issues.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that work is matched to pupils' learning needs and abilities. The sharp focus placed on this has led to very clear improvements in pupils' outcomes. Over the last three years, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected and higher standards for their age have risen consistently. In 2018, almost three quarters of the Year 6 pupils reached the nationally expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined. This was well above the national average. A fifth reached the higher standards. This was twice the national average.

Since the last inspection, the amount of progress pupils make has also improved. Progress in writing rose from average to above average, while progress in mathematics increased from average to well above average. However, progress in reading has remained consistently average over the last three years. Specific groups of pupils have also shown improvements in their performance. For example, in 2018 disadvantaged pupils made good progress from their starting points in reading, writing, and mathematics. Low- and high-ability pupils made good or better progress in all three subjects. Middle-ability pupils' progress was more variable. It was strong in writing and mathematics but weaker in reading. You have rightly made reading a priority for improvement in this year's school development plan, to bring it in line with attainment and progress in the other two subjects.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Every parent I spoke to, and almost all who completed Parent View and the school's own survey, said that their children feel safe at school. All the children who met with me said they feel safe in school and on the way to and from school. They know about

the potential dangers of using the internet and social media and what they should do if they encounter any inappropriate materials. Through regular fire practices, they learn what to do, and where to go, in the case of a fire. They all have swimming lessons, so they can keep safe in and near water. They are also taught about road safety. Pupils know which staff to contact if they have any worries or concerns and are confident that they will receive the help they need. The pupils who met with me and those who completed the online survey said that a certain amount of bullying happens at the school but is dealt with effectively. Parents were more varied in their opinions, but the majority were positive about the way that the school deals with bullying. You and your colleagues work very effectively with outside agencies to support pupils and families who need additional help.

The school has rigorous systems for checking on the suitability of adults to work with children. All visitors are carefully vetted on arrival. All staff and governors have attended the required training on safeguarding. The staff I spoke to knew how to identify possible signs of abuse and what to do if they suspect that a child is the victim of such treatment. A risk assessment has been conducted in relation to the school's dog. This rightly focuses on the welfare of the dog as well as the pupils. The school grounds are secure and access to the buildings is carefully controlled.

Despite repeated requests not to do so, some parents are still parking illegally outside the school gates, as happened on the day of the inspection. Several cars were also clearly speeding as they went past the school, posing a threat to the safety of the pupils. This is an area for improvement.

## **Inspection findings**

- Standards have improved considerably since the last inspection, with pupils' results in the national assessments in 2018 being particularly impressive. I was interested to know whether these improvements are being sustained. Your analysis of current pupils' performance shows that, in each year group, they are progressing well. This was borne out by visits to classrooms and the examination of pupils' work. You were able to show me that the pupils currently in Year 6 are performing as well as their counterparts at this time last year. Therefore, the indications are that the pattern of improvement is being maintained.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is far higher than average. For example, in 2017 it was in the highest 20% for schools nationally. I was interested to know why this was the case. You rightly place a considerable emphasis on identifying pupils who are falling behind with their work, so that you can give them additional help. The impact of this is clearly reflected in the improving standards in the school. However, an examination of the data on pupils indicated that staff sometimes do not differentiate sufficiently between pupils with SEND and those who are falling behind with their work for a variety of other reasons. As a result, the list of pupils with SEND is inflated.
- In the past, attendance has been below average. Two years ago, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was in the worst 10% of schools nationally. You showed me that, last year, attendance improved to average. Since the appointment of the attendance officer last September, these improvements have been

consolidated. The figures so far this year are above average for all pupils, for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they review and revise the criteria used by the school to identify pupils with SEND, so that the list of these pupils is accurate
- they work with the police, the highways department, parents and the local community to prevent children's safety being endangered by speeding cars and illegal parking outside the school.

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

Aelwyn Pugh  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I examined a range of documentation, including the self-evaluation and school development plan. I met with you, the interim executive headteacher, one of the acting assistant headteachers and the coordinator of the provision for pupils with special educational needs to discuss the school's progress since the last inspection. I met five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke to representatives of the local authority and the archdiocese. You, the interim executive headteacher and I discussed safeguarding arrangements. The three of us also met with the attendance officer to discuss behaviour and attendance. The business manager and I examined the central record of staff. I visited lessons to observe teaching and learning and to look at pupils' work. On these visits, I was accompanied either by yourself or one of the acting assistant headteachers. I held a meeting with a cross section of staff, to gain their views of the school, and examined the 28 responses to the online staff survey. To gain the views of parents, I spoke to 12 parents as they brought their children to school, examined the 38 responses to Parent View and carried out an analysis of over 200 responses to the school's own recent survey of parental opinion. I met eight pupils, chosen at random from Years 3 to 6, and spoke to staff and pupils as I walked round the school. I also listened to pupils reading. I observed the traffic arrangements outside the school and talked to the crossing patrol officer.