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Mr Martin Murphy
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Dear Mr Murphy

Short inspection of St William of York Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 May 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 school's motto, 'Together Everyone Achieves More', perfectly captures the ethos of St William of York Catholic Primary School. Several staff expressed their appreciation of the way leaders seek and take account of their views before implementing new initiatives. Parents and carers, too, commented on the success of you and your staff in making their children feel valued and important members of the school community. During my visit, the spirit of teamwork was noticeably evident, not least in the way pupils worked together in lessons and carried out various responsibilities, for example as play leaders and 'bully-busters'.

Pupils' positive attitudes to school and their behaviour remain a strength. Pupils say that they enjoy school and talk enthusiastically about their learning in a wide range of subjects. Pupils gleefully remembered a practical science investigation about the components of blood. Pupils like the enrichment opportunities that are provided through educational visits and visitors and the chance to learn chess and take part in local and national tournaments. Theme weeks, in which there is a strong focus on specific subjects such as art, design and computing, are also popular, as is the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils' participation in several of these earns them credits towards graduation in the local authority's children's university.

Leaders have designed an engaging curriculum that develops a love of learning. The content and sequence of the curriculum, as well as how it will be taught, have been well considered. Around the school, displays show the wealth of interesting learning experiences pupils receive. Pupils' artwork is particularly striking, with examples of pop art in the style of Andy Warhol, sgraffito (scratched) cave paintings on clay, and younger pupils' collage paintings in the style of Henri Rousseau.

By the end of Year 6, pupils have achieved well in reading and mathematics. Over time, progress and attainment in these subjects have been at least in line with national figures, including for disadvantaged pupils. Achievement in writing is not as positive, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils. In 2016 and 2017, Year 6 pupils' progress and attainment in writing were broadly in line with national figures. In 2018, however, progress dipped significantly, and attainment was below average.

Leaders were extremely disappointed with these results, especially as a number of pupils were only a whisker away from attaining the expected standard. Even so, you and other leaders have identified that there is more work to do to improve writing across the school. Appropriately, writing is a priority for improvement.

Children in early years flourish. Parents are full of praise for the ways in which staff care for their children, build their confidence and help them learn new things each day. By the end of Reception, children's attainment remains below average. However, from starting points that are below, and sometimes well below, what is typical for their age, the children make good strides in their development. In 2018, the proportion of children attaining the good level of development needed to be ready for Year 1 increased. To build on this improvement, leaders and early years staff continue to focus on extending children's literacy and numeracy skills, particularly boys' writing.

Over time, attainment by the end of key stage 1 has varied between average and below average. Factors affecting this variation have included the quality of teaching and pupils' differing prior attainment on beginning Year 1. The Year 2 pupils who were assessed in 2018 had prior attainment that was well below average. By the end of Year 2, these pupils had made good progress in mathematics to attain broadly average standards. However, pupils' attainment in reading was well below average and their attainment in writing was not far behind this.

When the school was last inspected, inspectors asked leaders to improve some aspects of teaching, including the effectiveness of teaching assistants. Leaders have taken decisive and effective action to improve teaching. Judicious appointments of new teachers and thoughtful deployment of staff have secured strong teaching across the school. The leadership team ensures that all teaching staff benefit from a comprehensive range of training tailored to individuals' needs and school priorities. Teachers make very effective use of well-trained support staff who now make a valuable contribution to teaching and learning. Inspectors also recommended that subject leaders should be more directly involved in school improvement. In response, you have given these leaders additional time to carry out their

responsibilities. Subject leaders now check that the work planned for each year group builds on earlier learning, takes account of the school's context and reflects pupils' interests. They analyse pupils' work and assessment information, discuss pupils' achievement with senior leaders, and write action plans to guide further improvement.

Senior leaders' thorough evaluations of the school's work accurately identify strengths and priorities for improvement. Actions to address the latter are carefully planned and regularly monitored to check that they are having the intended effect. Governors are a committed group and provide valuable support and challenge for leaders. They attend training to improve their effectiveness and ask leaders searching questions about the school's work, pupils' achievement and spending. Governors visit school regularly to meet pupils and staff and to observe school policies in action.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Regular training ensures that the staff's knowledge and understanding of child protection matters remain fresh. Staff are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and alert to signs that indicate pupils might be at risk of harm. They know how to act if pupils share concerns of a safeguarding nature with them.

Safeguarding records show that staff are vigilant in passing concerns to the school's designated safeguarding leaders, who deal with these promptly. Where necessary, leaders seek professional advice and intervention to support pupils and their families. Your detailed records show that safeguarding leaders keep a close watch on the timeliness and effectiveness of action from these professionals to improve pupils' safety and well-being.

The pupils with whom I spoke said that they feel safe in school. They explained that behaviour is mostly good, and bullying is rare. They told me that there is always an adult they can confide in if they are upset or worried. The responses to Ofsted's online pupil and parent questionnaires confirm these views.

Inspection findings

- Writing was a line of enquiry for the inspection. This year, staff training has concentrated on writing, including staff working together to check and agree the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' writing. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are also receiving greater attention. Writing clubs have been introduced across both key stages to further improve the proportion of pupils writing at greater depth.
- Leaders have also reviewed and made changes to the curriculum to provide more opportunities for pupils to write in different subjects. Pupils' books show that this initiative is being embedded effectively. In history, for example, older pupils write

descriptions of First World War trench conditions, while younger pupils write diaries and instructions for fire safety after learning about Samuel Pepys and the Great Fire of London.

- The teaching of writing begins promptly in early years, with the youngest children having many opportunities to make marks in different media, such as foam, sand and snow. They become increasingly competent in controlling brushes, crayons and pens. As they get older, Nursery children enjoy writing their names and the different letters they have learned. In Reception, the children use writing in a range of situations. During the inspection, they were busily engaged in writing labels for the food on sale in their class supermarket.
- The high-quality displays of pupils' work around the school as well as pupils' books show that writing is taught well in all year groups. The ideas that teachers use to stimulate pupils' writing are equally motivating for boys and girls. In the samples of work that I reviewed, standards of writing were not dissimilar to those typical for pupils' ages. Some writing showed no obvious difference between boys and girls. Overall, however, boys' writing was generally less accomplished.
- The fall in Year 2 pupils' attainment in reading in 2018 was another line of enquiry for this inspection. In addition to this group's well below average prior attainment, some pupils had specific additional needs that had a more profound effect on reading and writing than mathematics. These pupils are being well supported in Year 3 and are gaining competence as readers. They use phonics effectively, know different types of punctuation, and are beginning to inject expression into their reading.
- As in the rest of the school, reading is taught well in early years and key stage 1. There is good teaching of phonics, including by teaching assistants. Consequently, the proportion of Year 1 pupils attaining the expected standard in the phonics screening check is in line with pupils of this age nationally. Across the school, pupils are immersed in high-quality children's literature, which not only helps them develop reading skills, but also fosters a passion and enthusiasm for reading. Pupils were able to talk about a range of authors and express informed reading preferences.
- My third line of enquiry was about how leaders check that pupils have gained a secure understanding of what has been taught in subjects other than English and mathematics. Presently, teachers assess pupils' learning in these subjects at the end of the year. Leaders are currently reviewing this approach to ensure a more informative insight into pupils' retention of what has been taught. Leaders are considering various options in terms of how well they complement the current system of curriculum implementation.
- Finally, I wanted to know how well leaders promote British values and teach pupils about diversity in modern Britain. There are strengths in the school's provision to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which link closely to the duty to promote British values. Pupils are able to name the British values and talk about some of their principles, but their understanding lacks depth. Across the school, pupils learn about religions, races and cultures different to their own. They know to respect these differences and differences in relation to disability. However, the curriculum does not provide pupils with

opportunities to learn about diversity in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. These aspects of diversity are recognised in the school's equality policy, but are not represented in the school's resources, curriculum or school displays about diversity.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve pupils' progress and raise attainment in writing, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils, so that by the end of Year 2, attainment is much closer to national averages and by the end of Year 6, attainment is at least in line with national averages
- pupils gain a deeper understanding of British values and have opportunities to understand and respect the full range of diversity in modern Britain
- they implement an agreed system for checking how effectively pupils understand the knowledge and skills they have been taught in subjects other than English and mathematics.

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 Sefton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margot D'Arcy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your senior leadership team to discuss leaders' evaluations of the school's work and priorities for improvement. I met with a group of pupils from key stage 2 and spoke to other pupils informally at lunchtime. I reviewed samples of pupils' work in all year groups. Accompanied by you, I observed teaching, learning and behaviour in all classes. I analysed a range of school documents, including those relating to safeguarding and behaviour and governors' work. I held a meeting with three governors and met with a representative of the local authority. I talked to parents informally at the start of the school day. I considered 29 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, including 18 written comments. I took account of 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and 29 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.