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Mrs Grainne Davies  
Headteacher  
St Vincent's Catholic Primary School  
Manor Park South  
Knutsford  
Cheshire  
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Dear Mrs Davies

### **Short inspection of St Vincent's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 May 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and continues to move the school forwards. Pupils, staff and parents speak very positively about the quality of the school's academic and pastoral provision. One parent said that coming to St Vincent's was 'A great start to children's educational journey', while one of the pupils simply said that 'It's just a brilliant place to come to school.' Virtually all of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online Parent View survey said that they would recommend St Vincent's to other parents.

Pupils are extremely friendly, well-mannered and welcoming to visitors. The very high standard of behaviour that was noted in the previous inspection has been maintained and relationships between pupils and staff continue to be 'exemplary'. Attendance levels are consistently high. Pupils display highly positive attitudes to learning, contributing enthusiastically in lessons, taking care to present their work well and responding quickly and sensibly to teachers' instructions. They express their views and ideas clearly and confidently, but also listen well and respect other people's opinions. Pupils have a good understanding of British values, and older pupils were able to describe impressively the difference between countries that are democracies and those that are not.

The school provides pupils with a broad and well balanced curriculum. Educational visits to places such as Weaver Hall Museum and Tatton Park enhance pupils' learning. The curriculum is further enriched by a varied programme of extra-

curricular clubs, and pupils are particularly proud of the successes that the gardening club has had in local competitions. The school also has a strong sporting tradition, and pupils say that they enjoy representing the school in different sports teams, including football, hockey and cricket.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. The learning environment in early years, both indoors and outside, has been developed very effectively so that it provides children with a wide range of opportunities to learn through exploration and play. Pupils also told me how helpful their teachers are in helping them to improve their work so that they know how well they are doing.

There is no sense of complacency though, and leaders know that there is still more work to be done. You realised that systems for tracking the progress and attainment of individual pupils and key groups were not providing leaders or teachers with sufficiently detailed information. The 'land, sand and sea' tracking sheets that you have introduced provide a clear, visual picture of pupils' level of achievement. You are using these tracking sheets now to better hold teachers to account and ensure that pupils are supported and stretched to achieve their potential more fully. You know that it is particularly important that outcomes in writing in key stage 2 improve quickly to be more in line with the above-average levels of attainment and progress typically seen in reading and mathematics.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff and governors receive regular training so that their knowledge of good practice in safeguarding is kept up to date. They have a secure understanding of what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare, and leaders follow these up swiftly. Leaders also ensure that appropriate checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know that their teachers will look after them. They have a good understanding of what bullying is, but are confident that incidents of bullying in their school are extremely rare. Pupils also understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, such as when using the internet, and a number of pupils have been trained to act as 'e-safety officers' so that they can support their classmates. This is typical of the school's proactive approach to promoting high standards of behaviour and safety.

### **Inspection findings**

- There have been a significant number of changes in staffing since the previous inspection, including in the leadership of the school. You and the deputy headteacher both took up your positions on a permanent basis in the summer term, 2017, although you had been acting headteacher for two terms prior to that. As a new senior leadership team you have quickly identified the school's key

strengths and areas for development, and have wasted no time in setting about tackling those areas that need improvement.

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which was to look at how effectively leaders were tackling issues with standards in writing at the end of key stage 2. In 2016 and 2017, attainment and progress in the key stage 2 writing assessments was significantly below national average. This is in sharp contrast to standards in reading and mathematics, which have been typically above national average over the same period of time.
- Your work to improve tracking of pupil's attainment and progress has immediately paid dividends. This is because leaders and teachers are now more aware of which pupils are at risk of underperforming in writing and can direct extra support or challenge accordingly. You also recognised that results in the key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling test were markedly higher than pupils' achievement in writing, and that this suggested that pupils may be struggling to apply the skills they have developed when faced with writing tasks. Evidence in pupils' books from last year confirm that this has been the case, as teachers have not given pupils sufficient opportunities to write at length and so consolidate their skills. There has clearly been a change of approach, and teachers are now challenging pupils to produce longer, more detailed pieces of writing more regularly.
- You know that there is more to be done so that standards in writing improve to match those in other areas. You are continuing to develop pupils' skills in editing and redrafting their work, and are using high-quality texts to stimulate writing. I saw the effectiveness of this approach with the Year 3 class, who were enthusiastically writing their own medicine recipes inspired by 'George's Marvellous Medicine'. You also agree that teachers need to ensure that their expectations of pupils' written work are consistently high, so that careless errors in spelling and grammar in written work across the curriculum are challenged.
- The second key line of enquiry looked at how well children achieve in early years. The leader responsible for early years is a knowledgeable and experienced practitioner. She ensures that detailed checks are made as children enter Reception class to identify strengths and weaknesses in their learning. These show that children start school with levels of skill and understanding that are broadly typical for their age, but that many aspects of children's communication and language are not as strongly developed. Good provision is put in place to ensure that children are able to learn through an appropriate blend of activities, some of which are led by adults and some of which children choose for themselves. Staff maintain detailed records of children's progress and so are able to provide support and challenge where it is required. As a result, children make good progress in their time in early years. Around three quarters of children achieve a good level of development by the end of their time in early years and a significant minority go on to exceed that level in many of the areas of learning.
- My final line of enquiry focused on how well leaders have maintained the strengths in pupils' behaviour and the curriculum that were identified at the previous inspection. These remain areas of strength for the school. Pupils' conduct around school and their interactions with each other and their teachers

are first rate. Their excellent attendance and broad smiles both confirm that pupils enjoy coming to school. The curriculum is broad and engaging and provides pupils with plenty of opportunities to develop their skills and interests in areas such as sport and performing arts, as well as in academic areas.

- Leaders, including governors, all share the same determination to continue to build upon the school's strengths while also swiftly addressing any areas of relative weakness, such as in writing in key stage 2. Governors are highly supportive but acknowledge that their understanding of performance data needs to improve so that they are better able to support and challenge leaders' efforts to further improve the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to practise their writing skills and build up their writing stamina, and ensure that pupils' writing in all areas of the curriculum is free from careless errors
- governors develop their understanding of school performance data so that they can check more rigorously on the progress being made to improve standards in writing in key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection I met with you, four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I also met a group of teaching and support staff and the leaders responsible for English and early years. I considered 98 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 15 responses to the staff survey. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of other pupils read. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.