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Mrs Donna Faley  
Headteacher  
St Thomas More Catholic Primary, A Voluntary Academy  
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South Yorkshire  
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Dear Mrs Faley

### **Short inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary, A Voluntary Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 July 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

St Thomas More Primary is a warm and welcoming learning community. You have created an attractive learning environment that demonstrates the high expectations you have of pupils and staff. Displays around the school are of a high quality and the environment is tidy and well organised. You and your leadership team are committed to ensuring that pupils receive good-quality teaching. You have appointed a number of new teachers since the last inspection and have a new leadership team in place. You have worked hard to develop consistent approaches to the teaching of English and mathematics and, as a result, outcomes are improving. You have accurately identified what needs to be done to improve the school.

Pupils enjoy attending your school. They appreciate the good range of opportunities they have to visit other places and study interesting topics. Pupils move around the school in a calm and sensible manner. They are polite and courteous when talking to adults and to one another. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms is a strength. They listen carefully to the advice that adults provide and are keen to share their ideas with their peers. Pupils are keen to join in with class discussions and speak with confidence when justifying their answers. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers would recommend your school to other families. One parent said: 'I am

so happy with the positive way in which this school teaches and cares for my child. The level of teaching has blown me away.'

Following your previous inspection, inspectors recommended that you build upon the teaching strategies that are used to further improve the consistency, quality and impact of all teachers' practice. Our visits to classrooms demonstrated that there is a real consistency in some of the strategies that teachers use to support pupils. There are common threads in the design of the classroom environments and consistently high expectations in the way pupils present their work in books. This contributed to improved outcomes in 2018.

At the time of your last inspection, inspectors recommended that teachers in the early years ensure that the quality of outdoor provision matched the good provision pupils received indoors. The outdoor area has benefited from an investment in resources and is now organised more effectively. The environment is now designed to allow children to build upon their learning in the classroom. The activities that teachers provide allow children to access a broad range of areas of learning and take part in purposeful activities. As a result, children make a good start to their education at St Thomas More Catholic Primary. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has been above the national average in recent years.

During the last inspection, inspectors found that rates of attendance needed to improve. Inspectors recommended that leaders adopt more effective strategies to raise attendance, particularly for those pupils who were persistently absent. They also felt that you should work more closely with parents and families to make these improvements. You are now much more rigorous in your approach to promoting good attendance and do not authorise holidays during the school term. You work closely with families and with external agencies to encourage good attendance. You analyse attendance information regularly to identify any pupils or families that may need support. A broad range of incentives promote good attendance and pupils enjoy aiming for these rewards. Your actions have been successful. Attendance figures have been above the national averages for several years. Rates of persistent absence have decreased and are now below the national averages.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding requirements are fit for purpose. You make appropriate checks to ensure that all staff are fit to work with children. A recruitment checklist helps to ensure that you have all relevant information about new staff. Staff who are new to the school undergo an induction process that provides them with the information they need to follow your safeguarding procedures. Staff receive all relevant safeguarding training and are provided with regular updates throughout the year. As a result, staff are vigilant and know what to do should they have any concerns about adults or pupils. You work closely with the local authority should you need any advice.

Pupils say that behaviour in classrooms and around the school is good. Pupils understand that there are different forms of bullying but say that this is rare. They

are confident that you will support them should they have any concerns. They appreciate the care that you provide. Relationships between adults and pupils are a real strength of the school. You plan opportunities for pupils to learn how to stay safe through a well-planned curriculum. Pupils are able to talk confidently about how they can stay safe online and recognise the risks that social media can present.

## **Inspection findings**

- The proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was below the national average in 2018. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading improved, but high prior attaining pupils made slow progress across key stage 2. I wanted to find out how effectively teachers challenge pupils to reach these higher standards.
- Teachers provide pupils with good opportunities to share their ideas and clarify their thinking. Teaching assistants are used effectively and provide good support. They guide pupils well, promoting independence and providing encouragement for pupils who are finding work tricky. The texts that pupils study provide language and plots that are demanding for their age. Teachers encourage pupils to identify words they are unfamiliar with and use these in their work. As a result, pupils have begun to use more complex vocabulary. For example, one pupil suggested he use the word 'egocentric' to describe a character in a book. Adults use questioning skilfully. They ask questions that encourage pupils to think more deeply and to justify their answers with evidence.
- However, your deputy headteacher and I noticed that there were times when teachers were unaware that some pupils were finding work too easy or too difficult. This meant that some pupils were not able to complete the tasks they were given. Others needed further challenge. You agreed that this is now an important area to improve.
- Following your previous inspection, inspectors recommended that you improve the quality of writing so that attainment is consistently high. Published outcomes show that the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in writing at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 is below the national average. I wanted to find out what you are doing to improve outcomes in writing.
- The leader of English is knowledgeable about the subject and, alongside your deputy headteacher, has reviewed your approach to the teaching of writing. Pupils now have good opportunities to write at length and to understand how texts are structured. Teachers plan lessons that allow pupils to build upon what was previously written so that they are continually improving their work. There are good opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills in subjects such as science, history and religious education. The study of high-quality texts underpins your approach. This allows pupils to consider the audience they are writing for and the style of writing they use. The vocabulary that pupils use, particularly in key stage 2, is of a high quality. Pupils now use this to improve what they write and make their writing more interesting for the reader.

- When we visited lessons and looked in books, we found that there are occasions when teachers do not plan tasks carefully enough to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Some pupils struggled to complete the activities they were given. Some of the most able pupils were not given tasks that stretched them. This meant that some of the low prior attaining pupils and some of the most able pupils were not making the progress they could.
- The school's website did not provide information about the full range of subjects in the national curriculum. The information provided showed that the school uses a themed approach to learning. I wanted to check whether pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum and that they are able to build upon their knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school.
- Subject leaders have begun to map out the content of the curriculum for each subject area so that the work that pupils complete is harder each year. This could be seen in books. For example, a study of Judaism in Year 5 built upon a similar study in Year 3. There are systems in place to check that teachers plan for all areas of the curriculum. Subject leaders have begun to carry out regular checks. They look at books, visit lessons, look at planning and talk to pupils. This has allowed them to plan for their next steps. Some subject leaders have offered support to staff and provided training within staff meetings. Evidence of learning in books showed that there are good opportunities for pupils to use their English skills in some subjects. History, science and religious education are a strength. The standard of presentation and handwriting is good. Pupils receive a comprehensive offer in both physical education and music and you work with external providers to offer expertise in these areas.
- Evidence of pupils' learning showed that there are strengths in some subject areas. However, other subjects, such as geography, art, design technology and computing, are less well developed. While pupils receive their entitlement to these subjects across the school year, there is less opportunity for pupils to study these subjects in depth. Sometimes, work does not sufficiently challenge the most able pupils. Often, there is no additional challenge for the most able pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers respond more effectively to the changing needs of pupils within lessons so that pupils receive additional challenge or support when needed
- the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in writing at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 increases so that it is closer to, or above, the national average
- teachers assess pupils' work accurately and set them tasks which meet their needs, including in subjects other than English and mathematics
- pupils are able to study subjects such as geography, art, design technology and computing in greater depth.

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

Yours sincerely

Jaimie Holbrook  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met you and other senior leaders and agreed the lines of enquiry. We also met with members of the governing body, a representative from the diocese, the subject leaders for English, history and religious education and the designated safeguarding leader. There were 19 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 18 free-text comments. There were 10 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff and 21 responses to the questionnaire for pupils. We visited classes together in key stage 1 and key stage 2. We observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. We viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and its plans for further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the school's website to check that it meets statutory requirements on the publication of specified information.