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Dear Mrs Lloyd

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, a Voluntary Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 8 and 9 May 2025, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in April 2024.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents and carers any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the chair of the trust board, the chair of the local governing body and a representative of the diocese the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to pupils and staff. I spoke with some parents at the start of the school day. I considered a range of documentation, including that related to safeguarding and school improvement. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to no longer be judged as having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

The previous interim leadership arrangements finished at the end of December 2024. The trust has seconded a headteacher to the school for a five-term period. A senior leader has returned from maternity leave. At the time of the monitoring inspection, a number of teaching and support staff were absent. Currently, four classes are being taught by temporary teachers or teachers on fixed-term contracts.

The new leadership arrangements, with strong support from the trust, have had a positive impact in moving the school closer to the removal of the serious weaknesses designation. Leaders have built on the foundations evident in the previous monitoring inspection while quickly and accurately identifying the next steps in the school's journey. The carefully crafted development plan shows that the school has a precise understanding of the actions that it should take to bring about short- and long-term sustained improvement.

Since January 2025, the road to recovery has not been smooth or easy. Considerable staff absence has, at times, slowed the pace of change. It has also reduced the capacity to drive improvements. This is because some staff are carrying a heavy load in terms of their responsibilities. This has increased workload and has led to some staff feeling less optimistic about the school's future.

Despite this challenging backdrop, the school has moved forward. The improvements in phonics and mathematics have been sustained and built upon. Staff have grown in confidence and expertise in teaching these subjects as they have become increasingly familiar with the curriculum programmes. A whole-school focus on reading, especially in key stage 2, means this has a much higher profile in the school than was the case in the past. Pupils enjoy the dedicated time they receive to read independently, as well as listening to their teachers read well-chosen class books. The school is placing greater emphasis on pupils' comprehension skills to make sure they understand what they read. Even so, pupils' success in writing is lagging behind. Some pupils do not become proficient writers due to weaknesses in their basic skills. Others lack the opportunities they need to build stamina so that they can write at length and for different purposes.

Some pupils are gaining much greater ground in their learning. This is particularly true for younger pupils. These pupils have fewer gaps in their learning, which means they can benefit fully from the recent changes. As a result, they are increasingly better prepared for the next stage of their learning as they move from year group to year group. This is not replicated as strongly for older pupils. Some of these pupils continue to live with deficits in their knowledge due to the weakness in curriculum design and delivery they experienced in the past.

Work has begun on the wider curriculum to ensure that the new schemes of work are adapted to meet pupils' needs and interests better. Staff's teaching skills are being refreshed through suitable training opportunities. This means that teachers are more equipped to design activities that help pupils to learn curriculum content. In turn, pupils

are more engaged and excited by their learning. Even so, some staff lack clarity about the key knowledge that pupils should gain in order to be successful when they revisit topics and concepts. In some cases, pupils complete a series of activities that do not provide a secure foundation for later learning.

Staff's expectations of what pupils should know and be able to do are also rising. This is evident in some pupils' books. Here, pupils are showing increased stamina and emerging pride in their efforts. However, this remains variable across classes and subjects. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from adult support. This ensures that they access the same curriculum as their classmates. Even so, their books indicate that some teachers are less skilled in adapting learning successfully to enable these pupils to learn more.

In the early years, the promotion of children's early language has improved. Adult interactions are more sharply focused on ensuring children's learning is extended. For example, children were encouraged to use their knowledge of numbers to 10 and beyond when 'catching' fish in the water trough. Most children show sustained concentration while working on the purposeful activities staff design.

Many pupils behave as they should. They listen to their teachers, and they show respect to others. For the most part, pupils concentrate in lessons and learn without being interrupted. However, the turbulence in staffing has contributed to some pupils not following the newly established rules and routines. This means that the proportion of pupils suspended from school has risen sharply. The systems to promote and monitor pupils' attendance have been strengthened further. This is leading to a reduction in overall absence rates. For some pupils, especially those with SEND, there is a marked improvement in their attendance rates. Even so, the proportion of pupils who miss more than 10% of their time at school remains above the national average.

Pupils' personal development is improving strongly. They have a secure grasp of how to keep themselves safe and a much better knowledge of what it means to be a positive citizen in modern British society. The Victory in Europe lunchtime celebration helped pupils reflect on the sacrifices that were made to protect future generations. Pupils do their best to accept everyone, regardless of any differences. They are fiercely loyal to their school and to their teachers. Pupils recommend their school highly. They believe that staff go out of their way to keep them safe and secure.

Subject leaders appreciate the training and guidance they have received to build their expertise. They are beginning to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum delivery and its impact on pupils' achievement. However, they are at an early stage in terms of influencing curriculum development.

The trust continues to keep the school's progress under constant review and offers pertinent support and challenge. Members of the local governing body have strengthened their insight into the school further. There is a sense of cohesion between all those responsible for governance and leadership. They have a clear understanding of the

barriers to further improvement. They are taking appropriate action to overcome current challenges.

The school continues to be outward-facing. Alongside the internal support provided by the trust, the school utilises the expertise of others in the local authority. This approach ensures that the school is making the most of the help that it is receiving to improve pupils' education, behaviour, attendance and well-being.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Romero Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jo Olsson
His Majesty's Inspector