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Mr Neil Lewin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lewin

Short inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 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. Inspired by your vision that every pupil should be a 'St Thomas learner', you have built upon the school's caring ethos. Your focus on high quality learning across the curriculum has gathered momentum and is now a strong feature of the school. Pupils, parents and staff are proud of the school and all agree that, with each new development that you introduce, the school improves still further. As a consequence, pupils enjoy attending and staff are positive about their work.

High standards are celebrated throughout the school, for example, pupils' artwork in the 'Canvas Gallery' and in the choir's rehearsal for their imminent performance. Equally impressive was the Reception pupils' positive engagement in their child-initiated learning. In every classroom we visited, we saw pupils persevere at their learning tasks. A comment from a parent summed up what many parents feel about the school, by saying: 'The school's mission statement is clearly lived. Children are inspired to learn through the creative curriculum and enthusiastic teaching staff. The school is equipping them with lifelong learning skills for their academic, social and emotional development.'

Pupils play an active role by taking positions of responsibility, for example by being a member of your 'task force' or a class representative. These roles contribute towards the school's vibrant and nurturing community. Most pupils attend at least one of the many after-school clubs. These provide the opportunity to participate in sport, learn a language, play an instrument, make jewellery and look after the school's garden. The school offers these and many other ways in which pupils can excel.

A close relationship with a school in Uganda helps all pupils to develop their awareness of ways of living beyond their own community. By the time pupils leave the school they can reflect deeply and express themselves confidently. They understand that people in the past had a different view of human rights to those expressed in their school's values, and those of modern Britain.

You are effectively supported in your successful leadership of the school by skilful teams. Since the previous inspection, senior and middle leaders have become increasingly adept in using information about pupils' learning and progress to improve the quality of teaching. Governors are highly committed. They are knowledgeable and make decisions based on what is best for pupils. The governing body challenges you to drive the school forward. Staff appreciate the opportunities you give them to continue to develop their professional skills. An active parent community provides practical support and works for the benefit of their children, for example by buying equipment to support pupils' physical development.

In all year groups, pupils make strong progress in reading. More recently, teachers have improved the way in which they help pupils to develop their mathematical understanding. The new approach is resulting in high standards because pupils are increasingly able to use their good number skills to solve problems. Collectively, staff are now tackling the improvement needed in pupils' writing. At the end of key stage 2, in both 2016 and 2017, pupils achieved disappointingly low outcomes in writing. This is because, although pupils have effective skills, they did not meet the demand to use accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling in their assessed independent pieces of work.

You and the deputy headteacher know your school well. You recognise that your challenge is to secure consistently strong progress throughout the school in all subjects. The inspection confirmed that you are doing this with increasing success for current pupils, although there are a small minority whose needs could be better met. You are working closely with teachers, supporting them to use the information about each pupil's progress, to make sure that each pupil achieves their potential.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team fully understands its responsibility to keep pupils safe from harm. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding lead ensures that all staff and volunteers are trained to the appropriate level in line with their role and provides staff with weekly updates. School leaders make appropriate decisions about early-help referrals, work closely with parents and carers and follow through concerns conscientiously. Governors maintain an effective overview and all participate in training to understand risks. They ensure that all recruitment checks are in place for everyone who works in the school.

Parents believe their children are safe at school and pupils agree with this view. Pupils treat each other thoughtfully. They say that, if they have any concerns, for example about a bullying incident, they can talk to an adult and trust them to sort it

out. Pupils get on well together and keep to the school's single rule: 'to treat others as you would like to be treated yourself'. From the Reception Year upwards, throughout the school, pupils learn how to keep safe when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I focused specifically on: how effectively leaders are improving pupils' writing; how well you use pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils to do well; and how the wider curriculum helps pupils to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- The teaching of writing is carefully structured and staff have developed clear expectations for each year group. Teachers have effective subject knowledge and ensure that pupils have interesting themes for their writing, for example by linking it to the shared class text. Pupils' workbooks show that they make strong progress and become increasingly fluent and accurate in their writing over time. Pupils told me that the feedback from their teachers helps them to know what to do to improve their writing.
- Current pupils in Year 6 are on track to reach high standards in their writing, that are now in line with those achieved in reading and mathematics. Pupils' workbooks suggest that there is room for even greater challenge from teachers, particularly for the most able pupils, so they learn to edit their writing for style as well as for accuracy. The most able pupils use adventurous vocabulary, but some of them do not check that it is well chosen for their reader.
- During this academic year, you have increased the opportunities for pupils to tackle purposeful challenges in their writing, linked with presenting or publishing their work. Pupils are invited to submit work for the school's own monthly published pupil newspaper. Pupils recently wrote their own stories for a national competition, and they made and illustrated their own books during 'Book Week'. They enjoy these challenges and are equally positive about the writing they complete within their topics. They use their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills with greater accuracy when they are well motivated, such as when their writing has a real purpose. Such challenges now need to be embedded within the curriculum so that every pupil benefits from this approach.
- Since September, leaders and teachers are using assessment information with increasing precision to identify the needs and progress of individuals and of different groups of pupils. Although there are a small number of disadvantaged pupils in each year group, leaders recognise that this group of pupils does not make the same good progress as others.
- Led by the deputy headteacher, the inclusion team tracks each disadvantaged pupil's progress carefully to provide supportive strategies in class, both for the pupil and the teacher. The school has adapted its use of pupil premium funding to increase the additional teaching that takes place within the classroom. The funding is also used to ensure that pupils have support to address any emotional barriers to learning.
- The most able and middle-attaining disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with other pupils. You are ambitious for them to attain the higher standards.

However, teachers do not have an in-depth understanding of how to meet the learning needs of a small number of low-attaining pupils, which includes both disadvantaged and other pupils. Some of these pupils additionally have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers do not consistently adapt the learning tasks they set to meet precisely the individual needs of this group of pupils.

- The inspirational and well-planned curriculum is a strength of the school. Teachers make creative links across subjects, which means that learning time is used effectively. There is excellent coverage of all subjects and opportunities for pupils to present their ideas orally and in writing. Pupils learn to deepen their mathematical skills by handling and presenting scientific data, and through their use of accurate measurement.
- Year 6 pupils talked enthusiastically about their many memorable experiences, especially their residential visits and such events as their visits to Windsor Castle, Wimbledon and taking part in an Egyptian 'mummy's feast'. Pupils told me that they like all of their work. Year 6 have been inspired by their current topic to learn about aspects of 'The British Empire'. They explained how each Year 6 pupil adopted a character, and has written and presented a passionate speech, giving that person's point of view, about the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef. They are justifiably proud of this work and of all they do at school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers match learning tasks more effectively to the needs of low-attaining pupils
- recently introduced writing challenges become embedded in the curriculum, so that all pupils develop accuracy and independence as writers

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Jacobs
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited your school for one day. I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the subject leader for English, one of the special educational needs coordinators and four members of the governing body, including the chair. I talked informally to key stage 1 pupils on the playground and met with a group of Year 6 pupils. I visited a

number of English and mathematics lessons jointly with you. I reviewed a sample of pupils' books to check pupils' progress in writing. I looked at a wide range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan, information on the school's website, the single central record of recruitment checks and pupils' performance information. I took account of 133 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 111 free-text comments. There were 41 responses to the staff questionnaire and 96 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I also spoke to 18 parents at the start of the school day.