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Isabel Quinn  
Headteacher  
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Dear Isabel Quinn

### **Short inspection of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School, Dartford**

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 2016, 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 February 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your staff and governors have a clear vision for the school that promotes the achievement of every pupil within a caring community based on Christian values. There is a strong culture of nurturing and support, as well as having high expectations. Pupils learn in a happy, calm, friendly atmosphere. One pupil summed up pupils' views by explaining that 'nobody is ever left out, it's like a family, and everyone's got a role to play in the school'. Staff are fully supportive of the direction you set for your school. Pupils are keen to help one another and strong relationships throughout the school build trust and confidence. Virtually all parents are highly positive about the school and appreciate the teaching, care and support their children receive.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including the consistently high standards achieved at the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2 and pupils' good attitudes to learning. They also identified a need to raise the expectations of what pupils, particularly higher-attaining pupils, can do for themselves, so that work is always sufficiently challenging. Leaders have ensured that teachers have high expectations and, as a result, pupils' outcomes, including at higher levels, in reading and mathematics are consistently above those seen in other schools at the end of both key stages. However, last year, pupils did not achieve as well at the higher levels in writing. You have taken steps to address this using different approaches to writing in both key stages, and these have had a positive effect in a short time, but it is too soon to evaluate their full impact.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified two further areas for improvement: to ensure that pupils routinely respond to teachers' written advice about how their work could be improved and to give pupils more opportunities to consolidate their writing and numeracy skills in other subjects.

Leaders have addressed both of these aspects effectively so that:

- pupils regularly respond to teachers' feedback to improve their work; however, the quality of the feedback to pupils is inconsistent
- pupils are writing more fluently in other subjects across the curriculum, such as religious education (RE) and science; in RE, pupils were confident to explain challenging questions, such as 'what does it mean to be human?' while in science, although pupils described investigations with enthusiasm, they did not consistently use scientific language accurately.

Notwithstanding your successes since the last inspection, leaders and governors are aiming higher. Your ambitions have been limited this year due to the implementation of a new way of tracking individual pupils' progress, to align with the government's changes to the curriculum and assessment arrangements. The method introduced from September did not allow you to check precisely how well pupils are progressing in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly at the higher levels. You have sensibly decided to change your assessment system for the next academic year. Previously, pupils were clear about how well they were doing and what they needed to do to reach their next set of targets. Currently, pupils and staff are less confident about whether pupils' progress is on track to reach their potential.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You ensure that procedures for safeguarding the pupils are carried out correctly. Current policies now reflect the most recent national guidance, issued in July 2015. However, leaders and governors were slow to respond, and your written policy and training for staff were not updated until the beginning of the year. Leaders are now ensuring that staff receive appropriate training. Staff know pupils very well and they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly. They ensure that they seek the right advice from other agencies when necessary. Parents, staff and pupils are united in their view that pupils are safe in school. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn to keep themselves safe, including online. Pupils are confident that any concerns about bullying will be followed up rapidly and effectively.

### **Inspection findings**

- There is a very strong and consistent focus on Christian values. Pupils show respect for others and work in harmony. Diversity is celebrated and all members of the community are valued, cared for and supported.

- Your determination to provide a good education for the pupils at Our Lady's Catholic Primary School came through strongly during my visit. The parents who completed the online questionnaire, Parent View, and those who spoke to me personally were very pleased with the quality of education their children receive. They find you, your deputy headteacher and staff very approachable. One parent described how staff at the school 'will always make time for you'.
- Governors share your commitment to the school. They provide good support as well as the healthy degree of challenge required of all governing bodies. There is a wide range of skills within the governing body which are sensibly linked to the school's development priorities. Governors show a detailed knowledge about the school, although their judgements about some aspects of the school are too high.
- Children enter the early years with skills and abilities that are below those typical for their age. In 2015, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was in line with the national average. The school's own information suggests that children currently in the early years, including those who are disadvantaged, are making faster progress than previous groups, so that a higher proportion of children are on course to achieve a good level of development in 2016.
- We saw children in the Reception class responding well to adults' encouraging approach. Children were using their knowledge of letters and the sounds they make to work out and write words. This shows that children get a good grounding in early reading skills. Staff have motivated boys by allowing them to follow their interests and then capitalise on these to develop their learning goals successfully.
- Pupils throughout the school were enjoying a 'well-being week'. During our visits to classrooms we found pupils talking about emotions sensitively, mindful of each other's feelings. They showed sustained focus as they were taught relaxation techniques through exercising and storytelling in the school hall. Pupils I met were adamant that the school does all it can to promote both physical and mental health.
- The teaching I saw across the school was purposeful and clear. Work in books shows that pupils are progressing well, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils who speak an additional language and those who have special educational needs or disability. The most able pupils would benefit from greater challenge, especially through reasoning in mathematics. Pupils who completed the online survey felt they were not always given work which challenged their thinking fully.
- You are aware of aspects of teaching that would benefit from further development. You explained how the recently introduced 'milestone targets' are too broad to pinpoint pupils' individual learning needs and do not consistently stretch pupils. Leaders have set out to address this concern through the development of a different assessment framework.
- Although teachers' marking of pupils' work is thorough, feedback to help them improve their work is inconsistent. Pupils are doing their best to respond to the advice written, which is sometimes rather vague. Where it was most effective, pupils follow precise and challenging feedback to

improve their work. Leaders' scrutiny of work has tended to focus on how well marking complies with the school's expected practice, rather than the impact of teachers' feedback on raising standards.

- Throughout my visit I met pupils who were polite, caring and friendly. They show extremely positive attitudes to learning and behave very well. They gain confidence in a nurturing environment with high expectations and, as a result, are well prepared academically and socially for the next steps in education.
- Weekly behaviour logs are used to gather information about key stage 2 pupils' conduct in lessons, commitment to work, and quality of their homework. This information is sent to parents regularly and pupils said it incentivised them to do their best.
- Leaders and governors know there is more to be done to improve teaching and learning and raise outcomes for the most able pupils and children in the early years. Therefore, the school's self-evaluation is over generous.
- The school development plan covers a wide range of activities rather than prioritising the most important areas for improvement. Also, success criteria are not all sharply defined. This makes it harder to be sure how effectively all improvement actions make an impact on outcomes for pupils.
- The local authority provides light touch support for the school and you value the professional dialogue this offers.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers have an accurate understanding of what pupils already know and can do and use this information to adapt tasks to meet their needs, including the most able
- tasks planned by teachers offer sufficient challenge so that the most able pupils achieve the higher levels across the curriculum
- improvement planning sets precise success criteria to strengthen the evaluation of the impact of actions taken to improve pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I visited lessons in all seven classes in the school, jointly with the headteacher. I spoke with pupils during playtime and looked at some of their work. I met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of staff and four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of Kent local authority on the telephone. I considered the 25 responses from members of staff and 42 from pupils to their confidential online questionnaires. I took careful account of 34 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 17 responses by free text and conversations with parents waiting to collect their children from school. I looked at documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information about pupils' learning and progress, minutes of meetings and records regarding safeguarding and attendance.