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Wendy Killilea  
Head of School  
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Dear Wendy Killilea

### **Short inspection of St John's RC School (Essex)**

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2016 with Ofsted Inspector Vicky Parsey, 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 2013.

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

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

Supported by the executive principal, you lead a strong staff team, the vast majority of whom work well together to identify the barriers for learning for every individual pupil and plan steps to support pupils through these difficulties. Teachers are skilled at planning learning activities that enable pupils of all abilities to make good progress over time. Similarly, they go to great lengths to ensure that pupils can access all activities, no matter what their personal circumstances, for example, on the varied trips into the local community.

Staff and pupils are proud to be part of the St John's community. They all have high expectations of one another, and excellent relationships are the norm in this caring community. Leaders, governors and staff have a shared vision for the school, and you, as the new head of school, have quickly and rightly identified gaps in policy and procedure. The new policies you have put in place better reflect the positive practice and procedures in place across the school, and you are working to upload these to the school website to ensure that it is up to date.

Many of the learning environments reflect the good-quality work produced by pupils and young people celebrating their successes and the numerous activities they engage in, such as trips out, and pupils' recent performance of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Many teachers are creative with their use of space and resources,

making classrooms stimulating places to learn.

Pupils respond to their teachers' enthusiasm and engage well in a wide range of challenging learning activities. This helps many pupils to make good or better progress from their often low individual starting points. Good progress is made both in their academic skills and in their development of wider skills. Evidence from a scrutiny of pupils' work demonstrates that pupils' individual needs are well catered for, including those of the most able. Pupils can articulate their learning but are not always clear about the purpose of the tasks they are undertaking. As a result, pupils sometimes find it difficult to transfer skills between subjects and activities.

Leaders have ensured that the areas for improvement, identified in the previous inspection report, have been successfully addressed. For example, post-16 students benefit from a curriculum that is skilfully matched to their individual needs and abilities. Students now get to choose from a wide range of BTEC qualifications, including hair and beauty, painting and decorating, horticulture and performing arts. Pupils say they enjoy the range of subjects they undertake. They appreciate the opportunities offered to continue to develop their skills to the next level and to broaden their knowledge by undertaking a new curriculum subject. Leaders and teachers also now set targets for these students that are more aspirational.

It is a distinctive feature of St John's that teachers and learning support staff seamlessly support all pupils within class and in one-to-one situations. A speech and language therapist and family support worker complement the team, working in partnership to identify pupils' barriers to learning and then engage with the right multi-disciplinary team.

Parents are very positive about the school, indicating that they feel fortunate that their child has a place here. They praise the caring and friendly staff who 'have respect for all the students'. One parent praised the breadth of opportunity offered to her child: 'My son is in the school choir, he performed at the Shakespeare performance and he plays the steel pan and keyboard in school, he is in the swimming team and is working towards a yellow belt for Judo.' She goes on to explain how this 'brings out the best in him and he feels good about himself'.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are adequate. You have rightly identified some gaps in the previous safeguarding policy and ensured that arrangements are improved and fit for purpose. Child protection records, while complete, are sometimes poorly put together, making it more difficult to follow the procedure through. However, records are detailed and safeguarding arrangements are well managed.

New policies and procedures introduced are robust and leaders ensure that the relevant checks are made when employing new staff. Staff and governors are regularly updated through face-to-face and online training. For example, they ensure that they continue to effectively safeguard pupils with complex needs. Pupils'

medical needs are catered for. Medication is kept securely and clear procedures ensure that pupils get the correct medication at the right time.

Pupils were able to share with inspectors what they had learned about keeping themselves safe. Staff make good use of their high-quality communication skills to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to be listened to and engage in communication opportunities. For example, during Mass the priest 'signed' the hymn to ensure that all pupils had equal access to it, demonstrating that this is a community where the needs of all are considered and each child matters. Children are at the heart of what staff do every day and are always put first.

## **Inspection findings**

- Your assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is accurate. You have quickly identified the strengths of the staff team and pupils, but are also honest about the areas in which the school needs to become better. As a result, leaders and governors are clear about the next steps that need to be taken to improve the work of the school.
- Senior leaders are making use of additional assessment tools to ensure that each aspect of every individual pupil's progress can be measured. However, this is not yet managed in a coherent way to ensure that gaps in provision are identified quickly enough.
- You have identified the shortfall in policies, have re-written many of these and created others for those areas where they did not previously exist. The policies are now fit for purpose, including admissions arrangements which clearly portray, in simple terms, a very complex system. You have yet to ensure these are published on your website.
- Governors, senior and middle leaders demonstrate good capacity to improve the school. Governors are effective in holding you to account for your work. While improvements to the quality of governance are evident, not all aspects of the school's work are as robustly challenged by the governing body. However, the recent focus on performance review for staff has highlighted these gaps, and leaders are working effectively to correct this.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have access to the specific therapies and interventions they need. The range of interventions is wide, and pupil outcomes towards their identified targets are well tracked. Pupils' physical, personal, emotional and health needs are supported effectively, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils are encouraged to use their developing skills and independence as often as they can, during their work on site and during trips off site. Staff are effective in their risk assessments and ensure that pupils get every opportunity to plan activities for themselves and their peers. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their development.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- policies published on the school's website reflect the good practice seen in the school
- leaders and staff use the improved information about pupils' achievement and well-being to identify specific gaps in their learning and address them quickly
- all leadership responsibilities are distributed carefully so that all leaders know what is expected of them and can take action to improve the aspects of the school's work for which they are responsible
- staff are held accountable for the actions they take, particularly around safeguarding.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Our lines of enquiry focused on four things:

- How have leaders and governors maintained and further improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?
- How do leaders ensure that they involve parents and pupils in the provision?
- How do leaders and staff ensure that pupils are kept safe?
- Do leaders and governors have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement for their provision? How are they making it even better?

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the head of school, the executive principal, assistant head of school and other representatives from the teaching staff and leadership team. Pupils were spoken to throughout the day, and inspectors met with two representatives from the local authority. Inspectors observed pupils in classrooms, at breaktime and as they moved around the school. Pupils' work was reviewed. A range of the school's own analyses and planning was considered. Pupils' progress information was discussed, and safeguarding documentation and other records were scrutinised. Inspectors also reviewed responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and responses to the staff questionnaire were considered.