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Bridie Dodson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Bridie Dodson

### **Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 December 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in October 2010.

#### **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. A strong sense of community pervades the school, providing care and support for pupils, families and staff. You also have high expectations for the pupils. Pupils learn in a happy, calm, friendly atmosphere. It was a pleasure to see pupils of all ages playing together harmoniously at breaktime. A Year 2 pupil named all the pupils in the playground for me. Parents describe the school as close-knit, warm and caring, and beneficial for their children's well-being. Parents feel that staff at the school really listen to them and they appreciate the regular contact which keeps them in touch. They find the family liaison officer particularly approachable and helpful. Staff are also fully supportive of the direction you have set for your school.

The school's last Ofsted inspection was over six years ago. Three years ago, the school was the first primary school to join the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership (KCSP), which is a multi-academy trust. Over time, this has proved increasingly beneficial in providing external verification of your own school self-evaluation. As a result, you, your assistant headteacher and governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. As leaders, you set out determinedly to address aspects of the school which could be even better. You seek advice from advisers at KCSP and the local authority and willingly try new

ideas. For example, the school has gained recognition for its successful participation in a national project to improve engagement with parents.

You have tackled the areas for improvement from the last inspection successfully so that:

- provision for children in the early years' foundation stage has improved considerably
- more children than is typical nationally attain a good level of development by the end of Reception Year
- the local governing body holds leaders to account more effectively.

You rightly identified that pupils' progress in writing was not as strong as in reading and mathematics. Consequently, you have introduced a new way of teaching writing which has already had a positive impact on pupils' progress. Work in pupils' books is well presented. Pupils are keen to improve their handwriting and strive to achieve their 'pen licences' to allow them to progress from writing in pencil. Leaders have recently reviewed the quality of pupils writing to evaluate the impact of the steps they have taken, and what could be even better. Sensibly, you check your judgements with colleagues from other schools and also the KCSP advisor.

Leaders, governors and officers from KCSP are also setting out to improve achievement of the most able pupils. You have agreed ambitious targets for the proportion of pupils who are expected to reach greater depth in their reading, writing and mathematics assessments. To enable this, teachers are providing more challenging activities during lessons. Pupils enjoy trying these more difficult tasks but do not yet have the confidence to select the most difficult problems to grapple with.

You are working hard to improve attendance, which remains stubbornly below the national average. Leaders and governors have prioritised efforts to improve punctuality and reduce persistent absence. For example, you have introduced a breakfast club for pupils, which is increasingly popular. Governors have taken a firmer line and issued sanctions when parents do not make sure their children attend school regularly. The school's information shows that, overall, attendance is improving.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. You are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe at all times and that a culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Leaders ensure 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. The family liaison adviser works effectively with families and children experiencing difficulties. 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 safety. 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 well together. Diversity is celebrated and all members of the community are equally valued, cared for and supported.
- Governors share your commitment to the school and the quality of governance has improved since the last inspection. Governors 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 and newly appointed governors bring relevant expertise. Visits are frequent so governors can monitor actions taken and they have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- During our visits to classrooms to observe learning, you explained clearly the steps taken to develop staff and improve the quality of their practice. This, and other activities, showed me that you accurately identify strengths and areas for development, provide high-quality training and hold staff to account robustly.
- Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning. They know what is expected of their learning and behaviour. They gain confidence in a nurturing environment with high expectations and, as a result, are well prepared academically and socially for their next steps in education. We saw children in the early years and pupils in all other years responding well to adults' encouraging approach.
- Children enter the early years with skills and abilities that are below those typical for their age. Over the last three years, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development by the end of Reception Year was above the national average. This is due to the high expectations of staff, who enable children to settle quickly and learn purposefully.
- The proportion of Year 1 pupils who met the phonics check standard at the end of Year 1 was above the national level in 2016. Pupils read fluently and the books they are provided with are well suited to their ability. New readers are able to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds accurately to decipher new words. More confident readers use expression well to bring the text to life for the listener.
- Since the last inspection, you have identified writing as an area for improvement. Your assistant head, who is also the English leader, has overseen the consistent application of strategies to improve reading and, more recently, writing.
- The teaching I saw across the school was purposeful and clear. The school's information about pupil performance and work in books shows that pupils are progressing well, including disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The introduction of challenge tasks in lessons has improved the stretch for the most-able pupils. In mathematics, your participation in a 'mathematics mastery' project with University College Canterbury has already introduced more problem-solving into Year 2. However, older pupils are not consistently expected to explain their thinking when tackling problems, and this is limiting the achievement of the most able pupils. In science, expectations are too low, as

pupils do not use their knowledge and understanding to explain their observations.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all groups of pupil make good progress in writing
- teaching provides further challenge for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils
- attendance improves and levels of persistent absence decline to national levels.

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 met with you, your assistant headteacher, and six governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also talked with a representative of the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership on the telephone. I visited classes across all year groups in the school with you. I reviewed samples of pupils' work in writing, mathematics and topic books across key stages 1 and 2 and listened to pupils read. I considered eight responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I took careful account of 10 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text responses, and conversations with parents waiting to collect their children from school. I spoke with pupils from across the school during playtime. 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.

These inspection activities were employed to gather evidence against the following lines of enquiry arising from pre-inspection analysis.

- How effective is the teaching of writing?
- Is work challenging enough across the school, especially for the most-able pupils?
- How well are leaders improving attendance?
- How effective are governors at holding school leaders to account?