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Sue McGuiggan
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Dear Miss McGuiggan

Short inspection of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Harlow

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2017, 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 January 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 have created a culture and ethos that focuses relentlessly on teaching and learning. You inspire staff to strive for the best possible outcomes for pupils' personal development and academic achievement. They hold you in high regard for this and are right behind you, fully in support of your passion for continuous improvement. All 21 staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire agreed that the school is led and managed well. Most parents also recognise what an effective leader you are. This is evident in some of the glowing comments they made in Parent View, such as, 'the whole school is held together by the amazing headteacher' and 'the school is a real credit to Miss McGuiggan and her team'.

There is so much for pupils to look forward to at school, which is why almost all parents confirmed in Parent View that their children are happy and make good progress. The curriculum is impressively enriched with visits, residential trips, visiting speakers, special events such as the international week, and outdoor learning such as geography field trips and use of the environmental woodland area. Pupils certainly have fun while they learn. Pupils make excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school promotes pupils' understanding of diversity particularly well through the curriculum. Pupils are polite, thoughtful and, as one parent commented, 'taught to be kind, caring and considerate'.

All pupils achieve well in music, geography, history and especially in reading and writing where standards are above average. Disadvantaged pupils, pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities frequently make more progress than the rest because they are supported expertly in their learning.

Leaders recognise that, overall, pupils' achievement in mathematics is weaker. The mathematics team is working on this relentlessly with discernible impact. All classrooms now have dedicated areas to promote learning in mathematics. There are references and prompts to guide pupils while they are learning and extra activities to try in addition to the work they are set in lessons. Teachers ensure that pupils have opportunities to discuss and explain their learning so that they can find out more about how they think. They also build in tasks that require pupils to use and apply their mathematical knowledge in reasoning and solving problems. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. However, the challenge for pupils' learning in mathematics is still not consistently high enough to increase the number of pupils working at a greater depth than is expected nationally by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. You have rightly identified provision for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, in all subjects as an area for improvement in the school's future plans. Nonetheless, you have not specified a quantitative target in the plan so that leaders and governors can measure the school's progress towards achieving it.

The governing body is effective in achieving the right balance of support and challenge for leaders. Governors are well trained and highly committed to knowing the school's strengths and weaknesses through frequent visits and discussions with pupils, parents and staff. They are forward-looking in planning for the school's future. This is one of the reasons why the school's rapid expansion in pupil numbers over the past three years has been managed so well. While building works and recruitment of extra staff are ongoing, governors have not allowed these to distract them from their important role of checking to see how well pupils are learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are of high quality and records are detailed and completed diligently.
- You, and the governing body, have created a culture where everyone shares responsibility for safeguarding and it is a priority. A strong ethos surrounding children's safety and well-being exists within the school community.
- Staff are all trained to the right level to fulfil their duties, including the lead professionals for safeguarding and child protection. They receive regular updates, ensuring that all are familiar with changes in guidance from the Department for Education.
- You ensure that every pupil's achievement and well-being is discussed on a regular basis, so that support can be adapted to meet their needs.
- Staff are all vetted carefully prior to appointment and all of the statutory checks

are made to ensure their suitability to work with children.

- All staff are entirely confident in raising concerns. These are recorded and followed up quickly and effectively by the designated leads for child protection. They ensure that any referrals on to the local authority's designated officer and/or children's services are followed up quickly.
- Documentation, including individual child protection case files, is kept in very good chronological order and important information can be retrieved easily.
- Assessment of risk for educational visits and for potentially vulnerable pupils is thorough and comprehensive.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors are effective. They check the quality of teaching and learning systematically and evaluate how well the school is performing regularly.
- The school is working to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. This was an area identified for improvement in its previous inspection and one I selected as a key line of enquiry for this inspection. Across classes and year groups there remains inconsistency in pupils' progress, as seen in their written work, the school's assessment information and published national data. We agreed that currently most-able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils who are also most able, are not moved on quickly enough when they are capable, with a greater level of challenge and higher expectations, to make faster progress.
- Another line of enquiry was about assessment because, since the previous inspection, the school has introduced the new 2014 national curriculum. Consequently, the school also had to revise its approach to assessment. The school's practice in assessing how well pupils are learning in all subjects is effective and thorough. Leaders have successfully implemented a new system that is aligned to the 2014 national curriculum, away from the previous levels of attainment. Information about learning is carefully analysed and used to determine where pupils need extra help to progress quickly. This is why disadvantaged pupils, pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve so well.
- To ascertain that the school remained good, it was necessary to check that pupils achieve well in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. I found that leaders of foundation subjects (subjects other than English, mathematics and science) have strong subject knowledge and lead their subjects effectively with passion. They check to ensure that pupils learn all that they should and keep a watchful eye on pupils' progress and attainment. They know what is working well in their subjects and where aspects of teaching and learning can be improved.
- Prior to the inspection, too few parents had responded to Parent View to generate information about their views on the school. This is why I looked for other evidence during the inspection. By the end of the inspection day, 101 parents had responded to Parent View. In addition, you provided me with results of a recent parent survey that you had conducted. The very large majority of parents are positive about the school, as seen in the 101 parents that responded

to Parent View, of whom 94% would recommend the school to other parents. The school's internal surveys corroborate these findings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching of mathematics is consistently good across year groups and classes, ensuring that learning is closely matched to pupils of all abilities
- the most able pupils are suitably challenged in all subjects so that more are working at a greater depth than expected for their age
- measurable success criteria are set with a quantitative target against which progress can be judged in raising the most able pupils' achievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the inclusion manager. We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and the school's information about current pupils' learning.
- Together with the deputy headteacher, I observed teaching and learning in all but three classes. We looked at a sample of the work in pupils' mathematics books and photographic evidence of pupils engaging in practical mathematical activities.
- I met with the leaders of English and mathematics.
- Teams that lead in geography, history and music gave a five-minute presentation of provision and learning outcomes in their subjects.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements, records and documentation were examined. Discussions were held with the designated safeguarding leads and the governor responsible for safeguarding. A case study of a vulnerable pupil was undertaken.
- I met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and five other governors. The views of 101 parents who responded to Parent View and 21 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire were taken into account.