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Mr Kevin McPartland
Headteacher
St Bartholomew's Catholic Primary School, Swanley
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Dear Mr McPartland

Short inspection of St Bartholomew's Catholic Primary School, Swanley

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide steady, effective leadership. Parents whom I spoke to were effusive in their praise for the school, mostly echoed by those responding to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. They have confidence in you and your staff. They feel that any issues are quickly sorted out and that the school 'goes the extra mile' to support families in challenging circumstances.

Leaders have developed a culture of high aspirations and of sharing expertise to raise standards. Teachers who are new to the school are very well supported by senior leaders. You have a very accurate view of the strengths and areas to develop in the school. When we observed teaching and learning together, your evaluations were astute and reflective. You want every child to succeed and to be challenged to reach their full potential.

Pupils are happy learners. They help one another, work hard, and told me that, 'It's good to challenge yourself'. They feel safe and cared for at school. 'I am surrounded by friends here,' and, 'Our teachers are kind and fun,' were just two of the many reasons for enjoying school that pupils told me. Pupils attend regularly overall. Any absence is followed up promptly and, where necessary, sanctions and support put in place for families whose children are frequently absent.

However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities lags behind that of other pupils.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths in the school, including pupils' behaviour and excellent attitudes to learning. You have been successful in maintaining these strengths. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Pupils settle to tasks quickly and work hard. Adults react quickly and in a very supportive way to pupils who are having difficulties with their learning. As a result, time in lessons is used very productively.

You have addressed successfully the areas that inspectors previously identified for improvement, notably, improving achievement in writing. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in writing by the end of Year 6 last year exceeded national averages. However, typical of leaders' drive for continuous improvement, your current emphasis is ensuring that the most able pupils do even better – rightly so. Working closely with other local schools, teachers have sharpened the accuracy of their assessment procedures in writing. This has led to planning that more closely meets the needs of pupils, so that rates of progress are improving quickly throughout the school.

Your current improvement plans are ambitious for the school. You recognise that the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, could do even better. Symptomatic of your reflective approach, leaders identified that most-able pupils were not sufficiently adept at reasoning in mathematics, for example, to reach the higher standard. As a result, teachers have begun to teach pupils a broader range of strategies on which to draw.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The site is secure and well maintained. Procedures for entry to the school are stringent. You hold detailed records of checks on the suitability of staff. Staff and governors are clear about procedures for keeping children safe and what to do if concerns arise. Staff record thoroughly and follow up any incidents or concerns to make sure that pupils stay safe. There are well-documented records showing how the school works closely with other agencies to protect pupils from neglect or abuse.

Pupils are rightly proud of their school and said that, 'Everyone gets on well together,' with the older children helping the younger ones to have happy play- and lunchtimes. This contributes well to pupils' sense of community within the school. Relationships are warm and nurturing, underpinned by the school's mission statement. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe while using the internet.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders and governors have reacted in a prompt and effective manner to a downturn in standards, relative to children's starting points, at key stage 1 in 2016. The appointment of new senior leaders and internal movement of staff have helped increase the pace of school improvement. As a result, current key stage 1 pupils are making good progress and are well placed to achieve better outcomes this year.
- A range of strategies to improve outcomes in writing further is starting to bear fruit. The good quality of writing produced by current Years 1 and 2 pupils indicates that standards are rising securely. A new writing programme to help less able writers in Years 5 and 6 has given the pupils more confidence. As a result, they are writing at greater length and at a higher standard. Early indications are that spelling is also improving through the specific intervention programmes your team has put in place.
- Good progress in writing is visible in pupils' books across year groups and subjects. Pupils edit their work effectively and know what they have to do to improve. Current tracking of progress across key stage 1 confirms that outcomes are on track to be at least at expected levels for all groups of pupils in 2017.
- Pupils are prepared well for their secondary education. Overall in 2016, more pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, reached the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics than other pupils nationally.
- Pupils welcome the increasing levels of challenge. One pupil's determination to, 'persevere, challenge myself and not be left behind,' was typical of the positive attitudes I found.
- In recent years, a broadly average proportion of pupils have met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check. Comparing phonics outcomes for disadvantaged pupils with those of other pupils nationally, the difference is diminishing well over time.
- Pupil premium funding has been spent effectively. Additional adults support disadvantaged pupils well in mathematics, writing and reading. They provide excellent role models in speaking and listening and their subject knowledge is good. This is helping less confident pupils to make better progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance improves for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, really excel.

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

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and other school leaders. I also met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I observed the quality of teaching and learning with you in most classrooms.

I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information, the school improvement plan, leaders' self-evaluation, pupils' work, and child protection procedures and policies. I talked to pupils about their learning and looked at their books. I viewed 14 responses to Parent View. At the beginning of the day, I had conversations with parents and carers. There were no staff or pupil questionnaire returns.