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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Linda Briggs
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
St Peter's Park Road
Broadstairs
Kent
CT10 2BA

Dear Mrs Briggs

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and enhanced the good quality of education in the school since the section 5 inspection of the predecessor school. Your ambition for the school is evident. As a result, the culture of this school is one of high expectations, care and consideration for all. You ensure that every pupil is known as an individual and is supported to achieve their best. You, your staff and governors have created a strong school community with Catholic values at the heart of the ethos for all pupils. Strong partnerships exist between the school, the local community, the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership and the diocese.

You have been passionate in your determination to foster an inclusive community where staff, pupils and parents feel valued and respected. The school has good systems to identify pupils who may need extra help. When concerns are raised, appropriate interventions are put in place to support learning and, where necessary, improve attendance. You rightly identified that attendance rates for a number of pupils at the school were well below national levels and that this has been an important area for improvement. You have secured appropriate support from outside agencies to tackle poor attendance. As a result, attendance has improved during the past year. Further work is planned to gather and analyse information to enable you to focus ever more sharply on the impact of actions.

Your continued focus on improving teaching has been successful. Children enter the early years with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. From their individual starting points, progress is good. This is reflected in a higher proportion of

children at your school achieving a good level of development in 2016, compared with national figures. In 2016, at the end of Year 2, a small number of pupils had not reached the standards expected for their age in reading. Current assessment information indicates that all pupils are now progressing well. In 2016, pupils' outcomes by the end of Year 6 were above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics, so pupils were well prepared for their move onto secondary school. The information you provided about current pupils' achievement indicates that good provision and outcomes continue. Your plans for improvement have identified appropriate priorities to strengthen outcomes for pupils further. You recognise that the plans would benefit from focusing more sharply and specifically on the progress made by pupils from their respective starting points.

The professional development of all staff is given careful consideration. Accredited training, alongside work with other schools across the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership, is providing opportunities to develop leadership capacity, particularly in governance and middle leadership. One middle leader told me how they had been encouraged to 'take the lead' in introducing a new strategy to encourage pupils to be more thoughtful about themselves as learners. Your careful reflection about the skills, talents and personal qualities of staff and pupils is enabling them to do well. Leaders have worked effectively as a team to ensure that all teachers engage pupils fully in their learning; as a result, most pupils are making good progress.

At the inspection of the predecessor school, inspectors judged that pupils had very positive attitudes towards learning and you have clearly maintained this. You are very clear about how you will continue to build on the school's strengths. For example, you are keen to develop a range of opportunities to inspire pupils in their learning and help them to reflect on, and debate, the way they learn. Pupils engage enthusiastically in rich discussion and enjoy the challenges of being required to solve problems or apply their reasoning skills. Your observations over the course of last term, echoed in our joint visits to classrooms, tell you that pupils are now much more engaged in talking about their learning than they were previously. One pupil commented, 'My teacher said it is OK to be unsure.' Governors are keen to use measurable evidence about individual pupils' progress and that of groups of pupils, to check how well new strategies are working. This vital information is starting to emerge from the school's newly improved tracking of pupils' progress.

The previous inspection recommended that all teachers make full use of day-to-day assessment in their planning. This is practice that is now evident across the school. As a result, there is greater consistency in the quality of teaching, with learning tasks tailored to the needs of pupils. This is having a positive impact on the rate of progress for all groups of pupils including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils are motivated and enthused by their learning experiences. They get on eagerly with tasks that demand they use their skills in real-life contexts, for example working out sale prices or testing rock types on the beach. Inspectors also asked school leaders to ensure that the contribution to learning made by teaching assistants is consistently high. Through comprehensive training and guidance, this area has been adequately addressed. As a result, teaching assistants now have a closer focus on their role in supporting individual pupils to make good

progress throughout each lesson. It is clear from looking in books, and from speaking to pupils, that they appreciate the support they are receiving.

Leaders and governors are improving the use of detailed assessment information to create sharply focused plans which clearly indicate expected outcomes. The importance of regular attendance for all pupils, in particular the most vulnerable pupils, still requires careful monitoring to ensure that achievement for all pupils is strong.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made safeguarding everyone's top priority. The training you have arranged and the regular updates you and your assistant headteacher provide have heightened the awareness of staff and governors in this area. You have kept safeguarding procedures under scrutiny, tightening them and making them more systematic. Rigorous checks on the suitability of all adults to work with children are recorded clearly and methodically on the single central register. You have ensured that the school's policies, procedures and protocols take account of the latest guidance. Adults in school are vigilant and make use of systems to express concerns. Record-keeping has become more systematic and is more regularly analysed in order to identify patterns, and evaluate the impact of safeguarding actions on pupils and their families.

You know your pupils well. When necessary, you work effectively with other agencies to support pupils and their families. Pupils say they enjoy school and feel safe and that there is always an adult who they can talk to if something is worrying them or if they need help. They are aware of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection visit we focused on the progress of boys in reading and actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. We also looked at the actions you have taken to improve attendance.
- Leaders and governors have a sharp awareness of the strategic role and functions of the governing body. Governors use their secure knowledge of performance data to challenge leaders on the information they receive from the school's improved tracking systems. Governors share your desire to focus ever more sharply on the impact of actions to improve pupils' outcomes.
- You and your leadership team have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and those areas requiring further improvement. Leaders recognise that differences remain in the progress made by pupils from their different starting points. Tackling the differences in the progress between middle-attaining boys and girls in reading has been a priority for leaders. A focus on improving how reading is taught has strengthened outcomes for boys.
- All school leaders are determined to raise achievement still further. This is a view

shared by the governing body and those external partners who work with the school.

- During our visits to classrooms we observed high levels of pupil engagement and learning. Pupils across the school spoke confidently about their learning, making links to other areas of the curriculum. They were proud of the opportunities they had to work with one another and review their learning together. As one pupil stated, 'I get a chance to share my opinions with others.'
- Staff are overwhelmingly proud to work at St Joseph's and value the leadership, support and opportunities to develop their professional skills further. Middle leaders have been coached to take wider responsibility for the progress pupils make in their subject areas. Improvement plans are clear and include steps to improve the outcomes for all groups of pupils. Staff understand the priorities set out within the plans and how to apply these in their classrooms.
- The recently introduced assessment system enables teachers to track more carefully the progress of all pupils. This enables staff to better support pupils who are at risk of not making sufficient progress. As a result, the reading progress of current pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 has improved. Differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils who are currently in the school have diminished.
- Teachers find varied ways to challenge and engage pupils, including the most able. For example, pupils learn how to design and create their charts to present their results in science, or make and write comparisons. I observed Year 2 pupils writing fluently, with humour and lively vocabulary. Most-able writers in Year 4 are making good progress, using a broadening range of ambitious vocabulary and organising their writing into effective paragraphs. Talking with Year 6 pupils and reviewing their work confirmed that they are encouraged to respond to complex questioning, and build their ideas across different subjects.
- The number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very low. Provision for these pupils is well managed, with pupils' individual needs carefully identified and met. More focus is now being given to measuring the impact of the school's actions on pupils' learning, progress and attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- strengthen school improvement plans by adding measurable milestones and use these to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' progress,
- continue to improve the attendance of all pupils and regularly review the impact of actions, focusing particularly on the attendance of vulnerable pupils to ensure they make good progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership, 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

Jo Lakey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you accompanied me as I visited the majority of classes. As part of this tour, I talked to pupils about their learning and reviewed their work. I also looked at a range of pupils' work on display and in books, when meeting groups of pupils. I held further discussions with you, your assistant headteacher, other leaders, the chair of the governing body and other governors, and a representative of the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership. I spoke with parents informally at the start of the day. I took account of 33 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered all comments from parents. I also considered the 18 questionnaires completed by members of staff. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records including those related to safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, governance and your own summary evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

I focused in particular on the following aspects during the inspection: the effectiveness of the school's work to keep pupils safe, how well the school has responded to the areas for improvement identified during the inspection of the predecessor school, the progress of boys in reading, and the impact of actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I also evaluated the impact of the actions you have taken to improve attendance.