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Marie Kelly  
Acting Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Kelly

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

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 the school was judged to be good in May 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school. St Joseph's has retained the positive ethos identified at the previous inspection in which pupils develop strong academic and social skills. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the quality of education provided by staff and feel well informed about the work of the school. This is evident in the many positive statements made in Parent View and on the day of inspection. Parents commented upon the 'devotion, skill and knowledge of the staff' and the fact that adults are 'approachable and professional'.

Determined leadership, including that of governors, has ensured that when there have been senior staffing changes, the school's drive for improvement has continued. This, too, is acknowledged by parents. One parent's view that 'the school has managed to remain strong throughout and continues to work to its strengths' was echoed by several others. You are providing clarity of vision and have brought an added momentum to improvements, which are clearly laid out in the school's improvement plan, already taking place.

Governance at St Joseph's is strong. The effectively led governing body provides challenge and support in equal measure. Governors share your deeply held ambition for the social and academic success of each pupil. Governors are regular visitors to the school. They use information gathered on these visits to question or commend leaders on the quality of education provided.

Pupils typically behave very well, are respectful and contribute fully to the harmonious learning environment that is such a positive feature in school. Pupils want to learn and are supportive of each other in lessons. They respond to teachers' increasingly high expectations well. You have ensured that pupils have access to a well-balanced curriculum, including opportunities for pupils to learn about a variety of cultures and faiths. As a consequence very many are developing into the reflective members of the community that you and your staff strive for them to be. Pupils move around the attractive, high-quality environment in an orderly, cheerful manner. They also mix happily and energetically at break and lunchtime.

You correctly judge the early years provision to be a strength of the school. Strong leadership in early years has ensured that children make a good start to their learning at St Joseph's. The learning environment is well organised, bright and stimulating. The proportion of children making a good level of development has increased sharply and is above the national average. This is because staff ensure that expectations are high, routines are clear and tasks are typically well matched to children's needs. The proportion of children exceeding national expectations is also increasing.

You and your leaders take effective action where you consider that improvements are required. For example, as a result of your developments in the teaching of mathematics, outcomes at key stage 2 rose sharply and were significantly above the national average in 2016. You recognise that there are still areas in which the school needs to improve. For example, you have firm plans in place to further develop middle leadership. You acknowledge that you require more precision in your tracking of pupils' progress in subjects other than English, mathematics and science. You also know that the pupil premium report on the school website lacks the detail of the information that you hold in school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils speak confidently and appreciatively about school leaders' actions that make St Joseph's Catholic Primary School a safe and happy place to learn. Pupils are able to explain the strategies they use to keep safe when using the internet and are alert as to why it is important to do so. All parents, who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe, well cared for and happy in their learning.

Pupils understand what bullying is and the forms it can take. They explained that bullying is uncommon at their school. School records confirm this to be the case. Pupils are confident that were bullying to occur, adults would deal with it swiftly and well.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are robust. Records, including the checks made on adults who work at the school, are carefully and securely maintained. Inspection evidence demonstrates that when a pupil is in need of support, leaders take timely and appropriate action.

Adults are well trained in, and alert to, their safeguarding responsibilities. They explained the actions they would take if they had any concerns about the well-being of a child. Adults follow the school's clear processes for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns.

## **Inspection findings**

- Overall pupil attendance has been a strength of the school. However, the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals was lower than that of pupils nationally in 2016. Persistent absence for this group was also high. This is why attendance was a key line of enquiry on this inspection. Where your careful monitoring indicates that a pupil's attendance is falling, you take decisive action to ensure that it improves. You also ensure that pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly. They value their education and wear the badges awarded for excellent attendance with pride. As a consequence, pupils' attendance, including that of those eligible for free school meals, is currently good and no group of pupils is held back by low attendance.
- I also considered the progress that disadvantaged pupils in each key stage make across the curriculum. While the number of these pupils in each year group is very small, they did not make consistently good progress in 2016 across key stage 2. You have a precise understanding of the barriers to learning that these pupils face. Using this information you and your middle leaders provide support that is well matched to each pupil's needs. Pupils explained to me that additional adults help them to develop confidence in their learning. They also told me how much they learn in their one-to-one or small-group sessions which focus upon numeracy and literacy.
- Your careful tracking of the progress that each pupil makes demonstrates that, currently, disadvantaged pupils are typically achieving well in English and mathematics. Evidence from pupils' books supports the fact that disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress across a range of subjects, often from low starting points. However, more needs to be done to ensure that these pupils, in particular those of lower ability, present their work as neatly as their peers.
- I also sought to establish how well pupils achieve in writing, especially at key stage 1. After improvements in pupils' outcomes in writing since the previous inspection, it appeared that a lower proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in writing in 2016. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that most pupils achieve well in writing in key stage 1. They are progressively more accurate in their use of grammar and more complex sentence structures. In key stage 2, pupils relish the opportunities to write at length and edit and redraft their work and are increasingly proficient in doing so. In the words of one pupil, 'This helps us to understand how we can improve our use of language.' Pupils are also applying their writing skills well in other subjects across the curriculum.
- Another key line of enquiry was to explore how well most-able pupils are challenged to make the progress of which they are capable. This was an area for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils confidently informed me that they are challenged to achieve their best. One commented that 'we are not spoon-fed in our learning', while another commented, 'Work here is

hard, but if it was easy we would not learn anything new.' Evidence from most-able pupils' books indicates that overall they are achieving well. For example, pupils in key stage 1 respond well to demanding writing tasks and are making good progress as a result. Most-able pupils in key stage 2 make good use of their higher-level skills to solve the more complex mathematical problems they are provided with. However, you rightly identify that the way that a small number of teachers organise writing tasks limits the freedom with which some most-able pupils are able to write.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide regular activities that enable the most able pupils to write at length so that they can extend their skills further, and pupils have the time to make the most of these opportunities
- middle leaders measure and evaluate the progress that pupils make across the curriculum with the same precision and rigour as they do in English, mathematics and science
- adults expect the same standard of high-quality presentation from all groups of pupils, in particular those of lower ability and those who are disadvantaged.

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

John Lucas  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- During the course of this inspection I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders and a group of five governors. I also spoke with a representative from the local authority on the telephone.
- I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. I also met with a group of 10 pupils chosen by you.
- During two tours of the school with you, I visited each class and observed pupils at work.
- I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including: the school's self-

evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; minutes of governors' meetings; and curriculum plans.

- I considered the views of 31 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views that parents expressed via free text. I also took into account the views of parents who spoke with me over the course of the inspection.