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Mrs Katy Ward
Headteacher
St Michael's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Ward

Short inspection of St Michael's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 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 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 have an ambitious vision for the school's future, captured in the school's updated mission statement: 'to achieve excellence in everything we do'. You have taken steps to ensure that a wider range of the school team, including governors, is involved in developing aspects of school planning, which has helped to create more leadership capacity. For example, the use of an electronic rather than paper-based self-evaluation document has enabled a wider range of staff to contribute than was previously possible. As a result, leaders at all levels are clearer about their roles in tackling the aspects of the school's work that need strengthening and how they will measure the impact of their work. There is absolute support for the school's mission, as evident from the overwhelmingly positive comments about the leadership of the school in the responses to the staff questionnaire.

The school is a safe, ordered and harmonious environment. Pupils across year groups behave well during lessons and at unstructured times. Pupils' positive attitudes support their learning in class and they make good progress as a result. The school works hard to provide a range of experiences to enrich the curriculum and support pupils' personal development. For example, older pupils support younger peers in the 'Leaders for Readers' scheme, which builds links across the year groups. School leaders share the desire to ensure that all pupils receive a 'well-rounded' education that develops the whole child in line with the school's clearly defined ethos.

Leaders have addressed the key areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection. For example, fiction books currently made available to pupils are evidence of the greater challenge provided for the most able so that their reading skills are routinely stretched. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is broadly in line with that of their non-disadvantaged peers nationally at both key stages 1 and 2. Together with your leadership team, you have rightly prioritised ensuring that any remaining differences between how well different groups of pupils achieve are diminishing. While the school judges the current progress of boys to be in line with that of girls, this is an area that leaders rightly acknowledge must remain a priority to ensure that boys and girls achieve equally well in reading and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust and fit for purpose, and that records are suitably detailed. You, together with your staff and governors, ensure that the safety and well-being of pupils are a priority. Staff follow the school's procedures carefully to support pupils' welfare. The school's systems support the ethos that places safeguarding at the heart of 'every day of school life'.

Staff and governors are clear about their roles, and work effectively with parents and external agencies to safeguard pupils. Staff have received appropriate information and training, informed by statutory guidance. Pupils report that they feel safe in school. They say that staff encourage them to be friendly and kind to each other. I saw first hand the positive way in which pupils interact with their peers. Attendance is a strength of the school and remains above national averages. Leaders have put systems in place to ensure that any absence is followed up swiftly. Consequently, persistent absence is well below national averages, meaning that the overwhelming majority of pupils are in school every day.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' progress in key stage 2 was below the national average for reading in 2016 and disadvantaged pupils made slower progress than their peers nationally. As a result of these disappointing outcomes, leaders have taken swift action, which is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. For example, leaders receive more focused updates from class teachers on pupils who are falling behind. This has led to timely interventions being put in place to help those pupils catch up quickly. Current assessment information shows that pupils, including the most able, are making good progress from their starting points and a greater proportion are working at the standard expected for their age. Nevertheless, leaders, including governors, are clear that the development of strategies to promote reading must remain a key focus if recent improvements are to be sustained.

- The introduction of a new approach for mathematics teaching has been successfully implemented. The approach means that teachers have a clearer model of what effective progress looks like. As a result, pupils who need additional support to help them understand key mathematical concepts are identified more quickly. Pupils' understanding begins with concrete tasks to ensure that they acquire a depth of understanding before moving on to higher order thinking. This approach is proving to be most effective for younger pupils. The school's assessment information shows that the progress of pupils in key stage 1, including boys, is faster than it has been in the past. My discussions with pupils and scrutiny of books confirmed this. As with reading, leaders know that progress in mathematics remains a focus for school development following the below-national-average results for key stage 1 boys in 2016.
- Pupils in key stage 1, including boys, report that they enjoy mathematics and feel positive that they can persevere. For example, one pupil said, 'I found it hard but I carried on and worked out how to get it right.'
- The effective professional development of middle leaders is one of your main priorities in order to successfully pursue the school's ambitious aim to achieve 'excellence' for its pupils. For example, you have supported middle leaders to establish 'non-negotiable' elements in curriculum planning, which has led to a greater consistency of experience for pupils in their learning in all subjects, including reading and mathematics.
- My scrutiny of pupils' books, along with visits to lessons, confirms the school's view that Black British pupils' progress is in line with that of their peers in school. Last year, the progress of this group was behind that of their peers both in school and nationally. Sharper teacher assessment means that pupils who are falling behind are identified sooner, with leaders and teachers taking swift action in response. This has been instrumental in supporting better progress for all pupils, including those from Black British backgrounds.
- While progress has been made in developing effective links with families, leaders think that this rightly remains a priority for the school. Some families are unable to regularly visit the school, which limits the chance to discuss their children's progress with them. Leaders have introduced informal opportunities for families to visit school and meet staff. This is helping to build closer partnerships with these families and is leading to improved attendance at parents' evenings. Families who engage with the school report that they are positive about the way the school does things. The overwhelming majority would recommend the school to other families.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all members of the school staff develop the understanding, evident among senior leaders, of the sharpness of teaching practice required to sustain rapid progress in reading
- middle leaders embed the consistency of assessment practice required to ensure

that pupils who fall behind their peers in mathematics are supported to catch up quickly.

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 Newham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Boyle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- held meetings with you, and senior and middle leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding
- held separate meetings with representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority
- heard pupils read
- held informal conversations with pupils
- visited six classes jointly with a member of the leadership team across all key stages
- analysed a range of documentation including: assessment and attendance information; safeguarding information; and school policies and procedures
- examined the school's self-evaluation and aspects of the development plan
- considered the views of parents who replied to Parent View as well as parents, and staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire.