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Peter McCabe
Headteacher
St Simon of England Roman Catholic Primary School, Ashford
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Dear Mr McCabe

Short inspection of St Simon of England Roman Catholic Primary School, Ashford

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and your team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have created an inclusive culture where every pupil is valued and supported well to make good progress. Parents appreciate the work that you and your team do and many comment on the positive atmosphere, with one describing the school as 'a happy learning place'.

Pupils are well behaved, confident and articulate. They enjoy school and are proud of their achievements in and out of class. For example, a group of pupils wanted to show me the vegetables that they are growing as part of the after-school gardening club. They carefully explained how they were caring for them and when they were going to eat them. Pupils told me that school is fun and that everyone is nice. They particularly like the way that everyone works and plays well together. They enjoy the leadership opportunities that are available, such as the school council and playground buddies.

You have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and its priorities for further improvement. The trust has provided leaders and governors with very useful support to help you to refine and improve processes. For example, the trust adviser has worked with governors to increase the effectiveness of their challenge and support for you. Governors are determined and proactive. They have recently commissioned an external review to help them to develop their effectiveness further. They have taken on board all the recommendations and are rapidly honing

their skills, including their monitoring of how additional funding, for example pupil premium funding, is spent.

Despite staffing turbulence and recruitment difficulties, you have ensured that teaching and learning remain good overall. You lead by example, with a greater teaching load than is usual for a headteacher. You have also provided high-quality training and development for teachers and teaching assistants, and understand the need to continue with this work so that all teaching is as good as the best. Following some disappointing national test results in 2016, pupils' attainment has risen sharply and pupils now attain their age-related expectations. You are determined to build on this success and to ensure that teachers consistently provide greater challenge for the most able pupils so that they exceed age-related expectations.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well through the work of the school. The school's faith values are evident through all that you and your team do, and these help to promote fundamental British values such as respect. Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are provided alongside their lessons. However, you are currently reviewing how you monitor the foundation subjects to make sure that leaders can track and support the progress that pupils make in all subjects, not just the core of English, mathematics and science.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff know the pupils very well and understand what to be alert for and the importance of raising even the smallest worry. They have a secure understanding of safeguarding processes. You work very effectively with external agencies to support pupils and their families when needed. Several parents commented positively on the difference that your support and tenacity have made to their families.

Pupils, staff and parents are confident that school is a safe place. Pupils told me that they can talk to staff about anything that is worrying them and that they will be helped to sort it out. They also told me that there is not any bullying at the school because they are all taught how to moderate their behaviour and think about others. The vast majority of parents also have this view; a typical comment describes St Simon's as, 'a really special school where everybody comes together to ensure that it is a safe and happy place to learn'.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I considered how leaders made sure that pupils make good progress and attain expected outcomes. I found that, following the disappointing 2016 results, leaders took rapid and effective action to help pupils to make good progress. In addition, they made sure that, where needed, pupils were supported to catch up from lower starting points. Leaders, with help from the trust, reviewed and reshaped their approach to teaching phonics and literacy.

They provided high-quality training for teachers and teaching assistants. Despite staffing difficulties, this training and development have been highly successful, and teaching, overall, is good. Leaders monitor and support teachers effectively, making good use of external specialists and the trust. Consequently, pupils' attainment has risen to match or exceed national expectations. Leaders are determined to build further on these achievements and to make sure that all teaching is as good as the best.

- Many children join the Reception Year at lower than expected starting points, especially those children who speak English as an additional language. As well as developing staff skills, leaders have worked closely with parents so that they can work in partnership to support learning, especially of phonics and reading. As a result, Reception Year and key stage 1 pupils have made rapid progress, and most now attain at expected levels. Leaders are now, rightly, working to ensure that the most able pupils are routinely challenged so that they exceed age-related expectations.
- I also looked at how effectively leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and prepares pupils well for their next steps. The school promotes equality and fundamental British values successfully. Pupils are very enthusiastic about 'metacognition' lessons, where they develop their learning skills. They are keen to discuss their learning, and can explain their thought processes clearly. For example, during a science lesson exploring inherited and environmental human characteristics, pupils used scientific language to explain which aspects of cartoon characters would be inherited by their imaginary offspring. The curriculum is rich and well supported by a raft of extra-curricular activities that the pupils enjoy. However, leaders are aware that their monitoring of the foundation subjects is not as rigorous as that in place for the core subjects and they are in the process of sharpening this.
- I also considered how effectively governors undertake their responsibilities and hold school leaders to account. Governors know the school well and have been proactive in developing their skills and abilities. They have made good use of external support and the trust to sharpen the challenge and support they provide to school leaders. For example, the evaluation of the pupil premium funding has not been detailed enough in recent years. Governors now understand the need to improve the evaluation of the difference that this funding makes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Governors have made sure that the additional sports premium is used well; they can show that pupils' participation in a wide range of sporting activities has increased as a result of this careful spending.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teaching is as good as the best
- the most able pupils are routinely challenged so that they exceed age-related expectations
- pupils' progress in the foundation subjects is monitored closely so that leaders

know how well pupils are achieving in these subjects

- governors measure the impact of additional funding with greater precision.

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

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other members of school staff and members of the governing body. I also met with the senior primary school improvement adviser from the trust. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with pupils and look at their books. I spoke with pupils at morning break and at lunchtime and took into account 16 responses to the online pupil survey. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 34 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 17 written contributions by parents. I spoke with staff and took account of 20 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I also examined a sample of pupils' books. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding and behaviour. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's tracking of pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.