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Mr Mark Braund
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Dear Mr Braund

Short inspection of St George's Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. New to post just a few weeks ago, you have identified the many strengths at St George's Catholic School.

By the end of key stage 2, pupils show high levels of resilience and perseverance in their learning. They display excellent attitudes towards learning and are proud to be part of the school community. Pupils attend well and enjoy school. Many pupils in key stage 2 make consistently rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, the proportion of pupils meeting and exceeding the standards that are expected at the end of key stage 2 has been above the national average for the last two years. Pupils at this school are well prepared for secondary school.

You communicate a strong strategic direction for the next stage of development at St George's with your staff. As such, you are already taking effective action to improve leaders' and teachers' accountability for pupils' progress so that this good school can improve even further. You are working on the right aspects for development. For example, you are making improvements to the teaching of phonics in Years 1 and 2 to tackle the dip in pupils' performance last year. This work is increasingly effective in ensuring that the teaching of phonics is securely good.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to ensure that the targets and feedback that pupils receive help them to move their learning forwards. This work is effective.

Pupils routinely use advice from teachers and their peers to improve their work, and so make good progress. You were also asked to ensure that best practice is shared across the school. The school has worked hard in this respect. Teachers and leaders are inspired to achieve their best. The way the staff team work in unison is a key strength.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have responded promptly to the local authority's annual safeguarding audit, strengthening the school's work to safeguard pupils. As a result, there is a strong culture to keep children safe in the school. All staff spoken to on inspection understand the school's systems for reporting concerns and minimising pupils' risk of harm.

Training for all staff is up to date and follows the most recent national guidance. Clear induction procedures for new staff enable them to apply the school's policies and keep pupils safe confidently.

The checks you carry out when recruiting new staff are in line with national requirements to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. However, some record-keeping has not been as good as it could be. You are remedying this shortcoming quickly.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They say that the teaching they receive about e-safety helps them to keep safe at school when using electronic devices. Pupils say that they are settled and happy at school. They confirm that when problems arise, adults help them sort these out quickly. Almost every parent reported through the Parent View online survey that their child is safe at school.

Inspection findings

- A key line of enquiry, to ascertain that the school remained good, was to establish the effectiveness of the teaching of phonics in key stage 1. This is because the proportion of pupils who met the required standard in the phonics screening check dipped in 2017 and pupils' achievement was below the national average.
- A large proportion of pupils enter the school with limited spoken English. Most of these pupils make strong progress in their phonics development. However, changes to teaching last year resulted in less time spent on developing pupils' phonics skills. Senior leaders' checks on pupils' learning did not pick up pupils' slower progress quickly enough. As a result, some middle-attaining pupils did not meet the required standard in the phonics screening check, so these pupils entered Year 2 needing to catch up.
- Leaders have acted swiftly to put improvements in place. The teaching of phonics is regular and systematic across key stage 1. Teachers plan effectively to build on what pupils can do, know and understand. Leaders' checks on pupils' phonics development are now precise, thorough and used to deal with any weaknesses in pupils' understanding. This is paying dividends. Those Year 2 pupils who failed to meet the required standard in Year 1 are catching up quickly. Many of these

pupils are already meeting the required standard as a result of the good phonics teaching they have received this term. However, you accurately identify that this aspect requires close monitoring to ensure that Year 1 pupils whose attainment is currently low, and those who speak English as an additional language, make the rapid gains they need to meet the required standard this year.

- Another aspect I looked at was the impact of leaders' actions to ensure that pupils are making consistently good progress in their writing. This is because a smaller than average proportion of boys met the standard expected for their age in writing when they were in Year 2.
- Pupils in key stage 2 make good progress in writing overall. In Years 5 and 6, teachers have a firm understanding of the skills pupils must apply to write at the highest standard. They routinely expect this standard in upper key stage 2. As a result, pupils' progress is consistently good and often rapid.
- In Years 3 and 4, pupils typically make good progress. Boys who previously underperformed are catching up. Teaching in Years 3 and 4 enables pupils to apply their writing skills in their English lessons well. As a result, many pupils now demonstrate sophisticated sentence structure and precision when they write. However, some pupils in lower key stage 2 produce writing in their English books of a higher quality than in other subjects. Also, on occasion, some high-attaining pupils do not receive work that builds on what they already know. As a result, the most able pupils in Years 3 and 4 do not receive sufficient challenge. Teachers do not insist that pupils consistently use and apply their writing skills to write at depth in humanities and science.
- My third line of enquiry was to examine the impact of teaching on children's learning in the early years. This is because the proportion of children reaching a good level of development, the standard expected at the end of early years, has been below average for the last two years.
- Teaching in early years is good. A considerable proportion of children enter the early years with a very limited grasp of the English language. As a result of the good teaching they receive, these children make consistently good and often rapid progress. Consequently, two thirds of these pupils typically reach a good level of development. However, on occasion, adults' assessments and interactions with children focus on the completion of a task rather than assessing children's learning and development. Conversely, teachers' use of precise assessments of children's speaking skills along with a determined focus on this aspect of learning are already resulting in swift progress in children's speaking skills this term.
- My final line of enquiry focused on how well leaders, including governors, are driving improvement at the school so that pupils' outcomes, continue to rise.
- Over the last few months, governors and the local authority have secured a smooth transition of leadership from the previous headteacher to you. This has enabled you to appraise fundamental organisational and leadership systems in the school well. You have found that leaders at all levels have systems and structures in place to check the school's work. However, you are strengthening the work of leaders further so that they are becoming even more accountable for improving pupils' progress. This work is very recent. You accurately identify that

leaders' checks on teaching and pupils' progress could be refined even further so that they take into account pupils' starting points.

- Governors meet regularly with leaders to review the impact of their work. They have a good understanding of the strengths of the school. Increasingly they ask challenging questions of school leaders and seek to gather information for themselves to test out the impact of leaders' actions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- phonics teaching enables pupils in Year 1 whose attainment is low, and those who speak English as an additional language, to catch up quickly
- teachers' expectations of pupils' writing are uniformly high so that boys are consistently challenged to apply their writing skills across a full range of subjects
- leaders' checks on teachers' assessments and learning are precise, regular and track pupils' and children's progress from their starting points so that no group of pupils fall behind, including in the early years.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Clifton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, senior and middle leaders, and a group of governors. I also met with a representative of the local authority and held a telephone conversation with the primary strategic lead of education at Somerset local authority. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I looked at pupils' workbooks in detail with you. A group of pupils also shared their views of the school.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, development plans, school performance information, monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment, analysis of pupils' attendance and behaviour, and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 43 responses to the Parent View online survey, the free-text messaging service and feedback to Ofsted. I gathered the views of staff through the online questionnaire and through discussions during the inspection.