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Mr Graham Lobb
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Dear Mr Lobb

Short inspection of St Thomas Catholic Primary

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Some members of staff, and many parents, attended this school as pupils. They appreciate the way you have built on the school's careful balance between academic expectations and broader personal development, since you were appointed in 2015.

You told me that there is 'a lot of genuine affection for the school'. This was very clear from my conversations with parents and carers I met at the school gate. Many stopped to tell me how happy their children are at school. A recurring theme emerged about the personal care and support that children and, occasionally, parents receive from you or from members of staff.

The pupils were confident to talk and keen to tell me about their school. They are strong advocates for your approach, showing care for each other and the wider community. Their conduct during this inspection was excellent. Almost without exception, pupils feel happy and safe throughout the school day.

Since the last inspection, leaders and staff have worked together to address the areas identified for improvement. Mathematics teaching has been developed and refined to ensure the correct mix of problem solving, practice and the learning of new skills. There have been changes in approach to the teaching of reading and, since April 2017, increased challenges in the writing tasks the teachers set for the most able pupils. For example, the new 'extended writing' books contain many

examples of well-developed and skilful writing by the older pupils. Leaders are confident in the quality of teaching because it is regularly checked by using classroom visits, looking at pupils' work and tracking information about each pupil's progress.

Learning and progress are now strong in Reception and key stage 1. In 2017, pupils' success in the Year 1 phonics check was above the national average. The proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the expected standard in reading and mathematics, at the end of key stage 1, was above the national average.

Improvements have not yet led to the same degree of success at the end of key stage 2, where the rate of progress has been in line with national averages but has not increased.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have detailed knowledge of the pupils in your school and the difficulties that some of them face. As the school's designated safeguarding officer, you have ensured that staff are trained and they know what to do if they are concerned that a child is at risk of being harmed. Staff knowledge and confidence are strengths. Recruitment procedures are secure. The school's safeguarding policy is up to date and takes account of the most recent legislation. You ensure that safeguarding records are securely stored. You have a detailed knowledge of the school's work with other agencies to ensure that each individual child is protected. The school site is secure.

Pupils who spoke to me all said that they feel safe and that they would tell an adult if they needed help. They said that there was sometimes some name-calling if two friends fall out, but that teachers always help them to sort it out. I gained the same impression when I spoke to parents at the start of the day. However, in the surveys, a small number of parents did not feel completely confident about this. You are now aware of their concerns and plan to find out what is causing them.

Inspection findings

- Leaders had already identified that too few pupils were reaching the highest standards by the end of Year 6 in mathematics. The approach to mathematics teaching has been refined so that there is now a mixture of problem-solving challenges alongside practice and learning new skills. I saw this in lessons that I visited and in the pupils' books. The most able mathematicians are provided with demanding questions which provoke them to think deeply. Current pupils appear to be making better progress, and this is backed up by your detailed tracking of progress information. Leaders are confident that there will be an improvement in the 2018 results based on this evidence. There was a difference in progress between boys and girls in 2017. Current information shows that girls' progress is still less than that of boys but that the gap is closing.
- Progress in reading has also been stubborn to show improvement at the end of key stage 2. Leaders noticed this in their analysis of 2016 results and

consequently raised the profile of reading in key stage 2 and changed the approach to the teaching of reading throughout the key stage. Although numbers are small, there was a quick improvement for pupils with lower prior attainment and for disadvantaged pupils by 2017. Current progress information suggests that improvement will start to show in overall key stage 2 results in summer 2018.

- In both reading and mathematics, governors have been appropriately challenging of school leaders. They have wanted to ensure that the information they receive is accurate. You are equally clear that you want your teachers to give you information based on evidence, so that extra help is provided at the right time to the right pupils.
- Although you gather a wide range of information about pupils' progress and about the quality of teaching and learning, you and other leaders are not using this information systematically to evaluate which interventions are working well and which are not. For example, the strategy for the use of additional funding from the pupil premium lacks detail about the impact of the spending. The school improvement plan for this year identifies priorities correctly but does not evaluate how effective the actions you have taken have been so far. There are other examples where regular evaluation would enable you and other leaders to identify trends and patterns and to respond quickly.
- Since 2016, there has been an improvement in the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, bringing them in line with the good attendance of pupils overall. I was able to speak with some parents of children who have special educational needs and to read relevant comments in Parent View, Ofsted's survey for parents. The vast majority of parents are extremely appreciative of the adjustments made to support their children's progress and wider experience of school life. Much of this is personal support from you or from individual teachers. There are bespoke programmes which pupils are able to access, depending on their needs, such as to support reading, mathematics or social development. However, governors have not ensured that the annual information report for SEN and/or disabilities is published on the school website. Other statutory information is also missing, such as the names of the phonics and reading schemes. As a result, parents and prospective parents do not have access to all of the information that they should.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching challenges and supports pupils so that more of them reach the highest standards by the end of Year 6
- they evaluate the impact of improvement strategies so that there is timely information about what is working well and less well
- they ensure that the school is legally compliant in the information it provides to parents and others, particularly in relation to SEN and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Ward
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I considered information from a range of sources, including the previous inspection report and information about the school's performance in 2015, 2016 and 2017. I also reviewed the school's website and read its published policies. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and also considered the 49 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I read the results of other Ofsted surveys from 18 staff and 63 pupils. Meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and governors to discuss the school's progress since the last inspection.

I considered a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information kept in school about pupils' attainment and progress, the single central record of the checks on staff and volunteers, a sample of recruitment files, the safeguarding policy and records of actions taken to protect pupils' welfare, governors' minutes and provision lists for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. I looked at records of staff training to ensure that they were up to date.

I talked with a group of staff and some individually to make sure that they knew what to do if they were concerned about a child. We jointly made short visits to lessons, looked at the quality of work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning. I met formally with a group of pupils to listen to them read and hear their views. I observed pupils' behaviour around school, at break and in lessons.