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Mrs Clare Clark
Headteacher
St Laurence's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Clark

Short inspection of St Laurence's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You provide clear, effective leadership and you ensure that the school is an orderly, attractive and stimulating learning environment. This is a school whose values are intentionally built around its Catholic ethos. You make sure that staff, pupils and families feel welcome and are treated with courtesy and respect. Staff enjoy working at the school and the overwhelming majority of pupils, parents and carers feel pleased and proud to be members of the school community. Some families travel a long way to attend the school.

The vast majority of parents and carers I spoke to informally at the start of the day were pleased with the school. Typical comments included, 'There is a strong sense of community' and 'The school is brilliant. My child has fun and is making good progress.' These views were endorsed by the large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and by the very large majority of parents who texted about their perceptions of the school. The school's own survey, conducted in March 2017, also showed that the vast majority of families were happy with the school and had confidence in its leaders.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. They listen carefully to each other's views and they are polite to staff and visitors.

Recently, you have brought more stability to the teaching staff, by appointing

permanent teachers to replace staff who left part-way through last academic year. As a result, pupils in key stage 1 are now making good progress and the dip in last year's outcomes is being successfully addressed.

You have introduced a new curriculum, now in its second year of operation, which greatly assists teachers in planning engaging and challenging work for pupils. This, alongside the weekly curriculum-enrichment day, is proving highly effective in securing opportunities which add breadth, interest and skills to pupils' learning.

You have successfully addressed weaknesses identified in the last inspection. Pupils now have more opportunities to write at length across the curriculum and the quality of writing in pupils' English books is good. Assessment is also more accurate and you have introduced new expectations which you apply when recruiting and training teaching assistants. Since the school was last inspected, the progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has also improved and the inclusion leader tracks their progress carefully. A good range of interventions is in place to support pupils with identified learning needs.

Your decision, supported by the governors, to invest in improvements to the school's reading environment, has helped establish a strong culture of reading. Your investment has included purchasing lots of new books, developing classroom reading corners and introducing new reading assessments. Reading is now a strength of the school; last year, pupils at the end of key stage 2 made extremely strong progress in reading, achieving outcomes well above the national average.

Governors' decisions are based on clear information about the school's key priorities. Governors visit the school regularly and they have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors offer a good level of both support and professional challenge to school leaders. They understand that to improve further, the school needs to consolidate the rigorous approach to high-quality teaching which characterises current leaders' expectations.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records of staff's suitability to work with children are clear and well organised. There are well-understood systems in place for staff to report any concerns. The designated safeguarding leaders act quickly and resolutely to follow up referrals made to other agencies.

The pupils I spoke to informally around the school told me that they feel safe and happy at school. Parents' views were also positive. The vast majority agreed that pupils are safe and well cared for at school, with many choosing to express how secure and assured their children feel.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry

was about the quality of teaching in key stage 1. In 2017, outcomes dipped compared with previous years, with standards in reading, writing and mathematics falling below the national average.

- There was some instability in teaching last year, and leaders were required to employ teachers on a short-term, temporary basis. This led to inconsistencies in practice which have now been successfully addressed.
- During the inspection, we visited classrooms and observed teaching across key stage 1. It was clear that pupils were making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils were engrossed in their work, often undertaking practical activities such as building three-dimensional shapes, which helped them to apply their skills in solving problems.
- When I looked in pupils' books, I saw clear evidence of an appropriately broad and challenging curriculum in English and mathematics. Pupils are acquiring the basic skills and they are being given opportunities to extend their thinking with additional challenges. Pupils present their work carefully, take pride in doing their best and meet their teachers' good level of expectation about what they can achieve.
- Nevertheless, there are teachers in key stage 1 who are very new to the school, including those who are also new to teaching in this country. Leaders have introduced a programme of coaching and mentoring to ensure a timely familiarisation with the curriculum and the school's policies for teaching, learning and assessment. I asked you continue this work, and to focus on improving assessment outcomes at the end of key stage 1 so that results return to being at least in line with the national average.
- Another key line of enquiry was to examine the support in place for disadvantaged pupils. The school receives specific funding for eligible pupils and their progress is tracked carefully by the inclusion leader. Nevertheless, the last set of key stage 2 test results, at the end of 2017, showed that the small number of disadvantaged pupils had not achieved as well as their peers.
- Leaders are working hard to accelerate the progress made by disadvantaged pupils currently in the school and a good range of social, emotional and academic support is in place. Intervention groups provide regular opportunities for pupils to consolidate their basic skills if they are starting to fall behind. The inclusion leader ensures that pupils are assessed before and after each intervention programme, and this gives leaders information about the effectiveness of different programmes.
- There is a strong focus on developing pupils' emotional and social skills and a clinical psychologist works in school for one day each week, supporting pupils and giving advice to staff.
- There is a detailed plan setting out a clear strategy to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. However, in the school's published pupil premium grant report, the specific barriers to learning faced by eligible pupils are not sufficiently clear. I asked you to continue giving a high priority to improving the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils.
- My final key line of enquiry was about the quality of the wider curriculum, and

the level of work that pupils undertake in subjects other than English and mathematics.

- When I looked in topic books, it was clear that pupils complete a good range of work in different subjects. Religious education books also evidence the depth and quality of teachers' expectations and these books are extremely well presented. While there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to write about their learning in other subjects, the quality and presentation of this writing varies across the school. I asked you to give priority to improving the quality of writing which all pupils are expected to produce, especially in geography and history.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make good progress across key stage 1 by continuing to coach and support teachers who are new to the school
- disadvantaged pupils make good progress by providing support based on clear identification of their specific barriers to learning
- all teachers share the same high expectations about the accuracy and presentation of writing in topic books.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicholas Rudman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the school's priorities for development and the impact of actions taken. I also met the inclusion leader to discuss provision for disadvantaged pupils, and leaders who have responsibility for key stage 1 and for English. I met with six governors, including the chair. I spoke to the local authority's associate adviser for school improvement. I scrutinised the school's raising-attainment action plan, governing body minutes of meetings, plans and records for the use of additional funding, and the school's assessment information. I checked the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children. We undertook joint observations of learning across the school, looked at work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I analysed information from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including responses received by free text. I also analysed responses from staff and I examined the school's own survey

of parents' views. I considered one letter from a parent, and I spoke on the phone to a parent who contacted Ofsted the day after the inspection.