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Mrs Jean Sinclair
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Dear Mrs Sinclair

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Centred on a determination to do the best for every pupil in your care, you have created a warm, welcoming and ambitious school community. Your drive for strong academic outcomes is balanced with a rich curriculum which motivates pupils to try hard and value their time in school. This is reflected in pupils' excellent attendance as well as the pride they take in their learning and achievements. Displays around the school, including pupils' high-quality writing, celebrate what pupils do well and reinforce your high expectations. Responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, show that parents and carers have great confidence in your work. They overwhelmingly agree that their children make good progress during their time at St Joseph's.

Together with your team of skilled leaders, you are both methodical and aspirational in your evaluation of the school's performance. This approach serves the school well. Leaders prioritise actions astutely to ensure that the quality of teaching reflects their ambitions for pupils' achievement. As a result, standards in English and mathematics across the school are rising. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average, at both key stages 1 and 2. This represents good progress from pupils' starting points. Since the previous inspection, leaders' work to improve the achievement of the most able pupils has also proven successful. These pupils make good gains in their skills and knowledge because teaching is targeted effectively to their needs. Despite these

strengths, you and your team are not complacent. You recognise that pupils in key stage 2 are capable of more. As the school's plans for improvement show, leaders have rightly turned their focus to maximising pupils' progress further, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with low attainment.

Leaders have placed the development of pupils' writing skills at the heart of the curriculum. Through the school's topic-based approach, teachers plan purposeful opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills. Pupils told me how this helps them to 'use their imagination' and 'come up with interesting ideas' for their writing. Crucially, teachers expect pupils to produce writing at the same standard as they do in English. While this approach undoubtedly makes an important contribution to pupils' good progress in writing, the development of pupils' skills and knowledge in subjects such as history and geography is uneven. Although leaders are clear about what they expect pupils to learn, further work is needed to ensure that pupils' progress is equally strong across all the subjects they study.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance. As a result, they invest resources wisely to support leaders' efforts to strengthen the quality of education. For example, they have prioritised funding for specialist teaching in physical education, music and French to ensure that pupils benefit from a broad and stimulating curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that safeguarding arrangements are underpinned by a culture of vigilance. Vetting arrangements for staff, volunteers and visitors are thorough. Signs placed around the school provide adults and pupils alike with clear reminders on what they must do if they have a safeguarding concern. Staff are well trained on their duties to keep pupils safe, including child protection issues. They know the signs and symptoms of different types of abuse, including those linked to child sexual exploitation, extremist behaviour and female genital mutilation. Records of safeguarding concerns are detailed and comprehensive. They show that leaders and staff do not hesitate to act if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare, involving external agencies when necessary. Leaders know pupils and families very well. When families face challenging circumstances, leaders work with them sensitively to safeguard their children's well-being. This includes drawing effectively on support on offer from charitable organisations as well as the local authority's early help service.

Pupils feel safe and are kept safe in school. They told me that adults are 'really kind' and are always on hand to help if they are worried or upset. Leaders ensure that pupils learn what they can do to minimise risks to their own safety, including when they are outside school or using the internet. Parents who responded to Parent View agreed unanimously that their children are safe and happy in school.

Inspection findings

- Across the school, pupils make strong progress in reading. As a result, standards are high. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving age-related expectations at the end

of key stages 1 and 2 was above the national average. For this reason, my first line of enquiry explored how leaders secured these outcomes.

- Through effective phonics teaching, pupils get off to a flying start in the development of their early reading skills. Teachers' strong subject knowledge means they model sounds accurately. They plan well-chosen activities that support pupils to build progressively on what they already know. Equally, teachers routinely expect pupils to use their phonics knowledge when they are writing. This simultaneously reinforces pupils' phonics skills and ensures that they develop quickly into confident writers. Leaders and teachers keep a close eye on pupils' progress to ensure that no pupil gets left behind in the development of their phonics skills. Pupils who are not doing as well as they should receive timely and effective extra help to overcome any difficulties. As a result, pupils' attainment in the national phonics screening check is above the national average.
- Alongside effective phonics teaching, leaders have considered carefully how best to develop pupils' comprehension skills. Since the previous inspection, you have focused on strengthening teachers' questioning skills. This has paid dividends. Teachers are adept at questioning pupils to help them think deeply about the texts they read. They invest time exploring the meaning of different words and phrases to ensure that pupils' understanding is secure. This approach has been pivotal in improving pupils' reading outcomes at the end of key stage 2. In 2017, pupils made good progress overall, with an above average proportion meeting or exceeding age-expected standards.
- In your drive to improve reading outcomes further, you have not overlooked the importance of instilling pupils with a love of books and reading. Across the school, pupils read high-quality texts that capture their imagination. Classrooms have inviting and well-organised book areas which encourage pupils to read different authors and genres. In order to practise their comprehension skills, teachers expect pupils to read regularly, both at home and at school. However, lower-attaining pupils sometimes complete activities that do not help them build successfully on their existing reading skills. This prevents them from making substantial progress.
- For the last two years, pupils' progress in mathematics by the end of key stage 2 has been broadly similar to that found in other schools nationally. You are determined to strengthen pupils' progress in mathematics further and have made this a priority for the school. Therefore, my second line of enquiry explored the impact of this work.
- Since the previous inspection, you have taken effective steps to ensure that the most able pupils are routinely stretched in their learning. Work in pupils' books shows that opportunities for pupils to reason mathematically and solve problems are threaded through the curriculum. Teachers expect pupils to explain their thinking and how they worked out an answer. For example, Year 3 pupils confidently discussed how to interpret information in a graph as well as why it can be helpful to present information in this way.
- Work in pupils' books indicates that opportunities for pupils to reason mathematically are balanced judiciously with frequent practise of arithmetic and calculation skills. Pupils told me how helpful they find this because it 'gives us the confidence to tackle any problem' and they 'don't forget which method to use'. Teachers are quick to spot and address any errors pupils make. They provide clear, step-by-step examples to

help pupils master different calculation methods, such as long division or working out the percentage of an amount. As a result, pupils typically make good gains in their mathematical skills and knowledge.

- Nevertheless, some mathematics teaching is not sufficiently targeted to the needs of lower-attaining pupils, including the disadvantaged among them. Although teachers have high expectations of what this group of pupils can achieve, they sometimes plan activities that are too demanding. This prevents pupils from achieving as well as they could. You and your team are currently reviewing how best to refine mathematics teaching so that lower-attaining pupils routinely benefit from the support they need to make excellent progress.
- Pupils' attendance rates are considerably above those of other schools nationally. Very few pupils are persistently absent from school. Therefore, my final line of enquiry explored the reasons for the school's success in this area.
- The school's stimulating curriculum ensures that pupils are reluctant to miss a day of their education. Pupils brim with enthusiasm for their learning, including how teachers do their best to make school 'fun'. They told me that the wide range of opportunities on offer, including sports clubs, music lessons and an orchestra, motivate them to attend school and work hard. Through the chaplaincy team and school council, you involve pupils closely in decisions about school life, such as the design of the key stage 1 playground. This fosters a strong sense of community and promotes pupils' positive attitudes to school. Nevertheless, while the curriculum is broad and exciting, more work is needed to strengthen the development of pupils' subject-specific skills and knowledge in subjects such as history and geography.
- Leaders follow up on absence tenaciously to ensure that all groups of pupils attend school as regularly as they should. In 2016, you and your team took swift and effective action to tackle high rates of persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils. Strong partnerships with families and external agencies contribute well to leaders' work to understand and remove pupils' barriers to good attendance. As a result, persistent absenteeism reduced considerably in 2017 and was below that seen in other schools nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum gives due attention to the development of subject-specific skills and knowledge in history and geography
- in key stage 2, the teaching of reading and mathematics routinely supports lower-attaining pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, to make substantial gains in their skills and knowledge.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy-Dutton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and senior leaders to evaluate pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. Together with senior leaders, I visited classes in all key stages. I also reviewed work in pupils' books and school assessment information and spoke to pupils about their learning and experiences at school. I also took into account the 56 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils. I held a meeting with members of the governing body, as well as telephone discussions with the chair of the governing body and the school's improvement adviser. A range of school documentation was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement, attendance information and records related to safeguarding and child protection. I held a meeting with a group of staff, including teachers with subject leadership responsibilities, and took into account the 20 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. The 43 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, including 28 written comments, were also considered.