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Mrs Mary Hall
Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hall

Short inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You lead the school with kindness and concern, which you balance carefully with high expectations and a demand for the best standards of work. You know your school exceptionally well. Your governors describe you as a 'courageous leader' who does not shrink from tackling difficult issues. During the inspection, I saw your passion for what the school and pupils can achieve. Staff share your vision. They are resoundingly positive about your leadership. You are rightly proud of the various partnerships St Thomas More Catholic Primary School has with other schools and the lead role you take within them. Joint work between these partnership schools provides further opportunities to strengthen provision, as staff are able to see and share the best practice.

You have worked hard with your governors and staff to maintain the strengths identified at the previous inspection, such as making sure that teachers are trained well so that their teaching is effective. At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching further. With the support of other senior leaders and governors, you have successfully addressed this area for improvement. Classrooms are vibrant, purposeful places for learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together to make sure that pupils currently at the school make strong progress from their various starting points. Your staff team achieves this through skilful questioning which confirms and challenges pupils' thinking. Staff have high expectations of pupils' attitudes to their learning. This means that pupils play an active part in the exciting activities their teachers plan for them. Teachers and teaching assistants told me they value their training. They gave me examples of how

they have adapted what they do in lessons as a result. For instance, following improvements in the teaching of writing, more children in the early years who were previously reluctant to put pen to paper now write with excitement and ardour. Your new chosen approach to the teaching of writing is already having an impact. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 are now making better progress in their written work.

Pupils say that the actions you have taken to make the curriculum more exciting help them to learn well. Most pupils know how well they are doing and some know what they need to do next to improve. However, there remains some inconsistency in the extent to which teachers use all aspects of the school's feedback policy across the curriculum. This means that teachers are not always challenging pupils as effectively as they could in all subjects. You have also introduced your chosen handwriting scheme, which teachers use effectively. The result is that pupils present their work with care and pride.

Parents and carers I spoke with during the inspection were overwhelmingly positive about your leadership. The responses parents made to Ofsted's online questionnaire were also very positive. Parents say they admire your high standards and attention to detail.

You told me that pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare remain a strength of the school. Inspection evidence confirms this view. Pupils' behaviour remains exemplary. They are also unreservedly positive about the school. They told me that everyone cares for each other and that they feel very safe. Pupils are kind and considerate while on the playground and moving around the school. They know that, if a pupil is on their own, they should ask to play with them. Pupils know the playground rules and why they are important. All the pupils I spoke to said they have lots of adults they could talk to if they have a worry. They explained to me with great authority how the British value of the rule of law applies to their classrooms when they keep their 'golden rules' and the playground rules. Pupils carry out their various responsibilities with keenness. You and I observed pupils in Year 5 taking charge of snacks at breaktime. I saw evidence of the work of pupils in the chaplaincy team, collecting food for the local food bank.

Governors share your high expectations for what pupils can achieve. They know the school well. They ask challenging questions so that they hold you and your leaders to account for the performance of the school. Governors take their roles seriously, and this means that they make sure that statutory requirements are fulfilled. For example, governors ensure pupils' safety because they monitor the school's safeguarding processes effectively. Governors communicate well with parents through a range of means, including annual surveys and attendance at parents' meetings. When parents raise concerns, governors challenge you and work well with you to resolve them. They play an active part in evaluating the school's view of its effectiveness and work closely with you and your leaders to decide on priorities for improvement for the future.

Safeguarding is effective.

This is a caring school where pupils are known as individuals. Leaders, along with the governing body, have ensured safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and the strong culture of safeguarding is prevalent throughout the school. Staff are vigilant. They know how to spot changes in pupils' behaviour, appearance and use of language which might suggest a safeguarding concern. A very small number of parents raised a concern in Ofsted's online questionnaire about bullying not being well enough addressed, but I found no evidence to confirm these concerns.

Staff understand well their responsibilities in relation to keeping pupils safe from extremist ideas, including on the internet. Staff talk with confidence about the changes they have made to their working practice as a result of their safeguarding training. The school carries out thorough checks when staff, governors or volunteers are recruited to make sure that they are safe to be around, or work with, children. Records of these checks are well maintained.

You and your deputy designated safeguarding leaders have ensured that all staff understand their responsibilities for reporting concerns. You are at great pains to make sure that record-keeping is accurate and robust. This enables you and your staff to follow up the concerns raised, including with external agencies and professionals when necessary, in an effective and timely manner.

Pupils told me how they keep themselves safe online. Impressively, they understand the purpose of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection button on your website. You support them well with the use of the SMART (Staying safe, Meeting people, Accepting emails, Replying, Telling) approach, which they say helps them remember the five key aspects of online safety. In addition, the school's website provides very useful and well organised information, including links to other websites, for parents and pupils to help them to keep safe and develop a better understanding of safeguarding risks.

Pupils also told me that incidents of bullying and the use of discriminatory language are rare. When incidents happen, staff deal with them quickly and well. Pupils are unaware of any racist incidents. Your records also show that these incidents are very rare.

Inspection findings

- At our first meeting, we agreed the areas of the school's work which I would look at in greater detail, to check whether the school remains good. The first area I explored was how well pupils are supported and encouraged to attend school. Published information shows pupils attend school more regularly than pupils nationally but also indicates that pupils' absence from school is rising.
- You have set the bar high for pupils' attendance, and this is laudable. Governors support you with this high expectation. You have analysed carefully the reasons for the rise in pupils' absence. You have convincing evidence about significant improvements in attendance for some of your pupils as a result of leaders' work in this area. Pupils attend well because they enjoy coming to school. Parents'

comments support this. Governors have challenged you well on improving attendance by making sure that they include attendance as a standing agenda item for discussion in their meetings. When absence is due to compelling additional needs, leaders are dealing entirely appropriately with this. As a result, current attendance is above average.

- The second area I looked at was the progress that pupils make in writing. This is because, in 2017, pupils at the end of key stage 2 did not achieve as well as they should. I wanted to find out what leaders are doing to make sure pupils' current outcomes in writing are more positive.
- You know your school very well and so this outcome was not a surprise to you. You set about immediately putting in place different ways of teaching writing to avoid this happening again. Teachers across the school share your passion for ongoing improvement and so are fully on board with the school's new chosen way of teaching writing. You have made sure that staff are fully trained to teach this approach effectively.
- The actions you have taken have led to improvements in the progress current pupils in key stage 2 are making in their writing. We visited most classrooms during the inspection and observed that, in most cases, pupils are making strong gains in their learning and outcomes for writing.
- When I looked in pupils' books with you and your senior leaders, we saw that, in Years 5 and 6, progress in writing is strong. Since the start of the academic year, pupils are using more interesting vocabulary, they are writing more complex sentences and spelling is more accurate. We also agreed that progress in Years 3 and 4 is not yet as strong.
- The third area I considered was how well pupils are achieving in subjects other than English and mathematics. Your school's website pages about the curriculum indicate motivating and exciting experiences for pupils such as performance poetry, the early introduction of key phrases in French in the early years and 'we are network engineers', which gives pupils opportunities to develop their computing skills. I wanted to see if pupils were gaining from these experiences and making good progress across all subjects.
- You have worked with staff to introduce a system to assess and track pupils' progress across the curriculum. This is securely in place. The school's chosen system shows that all subjects are taught in detail and that pupils are working at an appropriate standard across most subjects.
- You and I looked together at the various displays around the school. They show evidence of the many and varied experiences from which pupils benefit. For example, teachers bring mathematics to life by covering topics such as 'minibeast maths' in the early years and 'Great British Bake Off maths' in key stages 1 and 2. Pupils told me that they love the many opportunities you provide for outdoor learning and that some of their favourite subjects are computing and design and technology. They also told me that they enjoy learning in all subjects and that learning about them each week is a good thing.
- Pupils' history, geography, religious education, mathematics and science books show that they are achieving well across the curriculum, often making rapid

progress. However, you and your leaders have rightly identified that pupils' progress is not consistently strong. This is because teachers are not always applying the school's agreed feedback policy across all subjects. Consequently, teachers do not always give pupils time to reflect on their comments and to identify what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils are not always clear about how to achieve further success.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils build on the good start they make in writing in the early years and key stage 1 so that they make consistently strong progress across all year groups in key stage 2
- teachers consistently apply the school's feedback policy so that pupils always have a clear idea of how to improve their work in subjects other than English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Jones
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, your deputy headteacher, the key stage 1 leader and members of the governing body. I also spoke to the school's improvement partner. You joined me as I visited most classrooms and you showed me displays around the school. Your deputy headteacher and key stage 1 leader looked at pupils' books with me. I spoke to pupils and staff throughout the day. I took account of the 64 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, and the two letters which were handed to me from parents. I considered the 16 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. I read the school's documentation, including the summary of the school self-evaluation, the school development plan and notes of visits from your improvement partner. I read in detail your documentation relating to safeguarding.