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Mr Jonathan Shields
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Shields

Short inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School, Gravesend

Following my visit to the school on 17 April 2018 with Peter Wibroe, Ofsted Inspector, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Senior leaders and governors rightly take pride in the 'St John's family' ethos that is at the heart of this school. The school is a warmly inclusive place, where diversity is embraced and the full range of pupils' backgrounds is celebrated. Staff morale is high and all who expressed an opinion said that they enjoyed working at the school and felt proud to be part of the staff team.

Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and those areas that need to improve further. They are well supported and challenged by governors and the academy trust, who share their ambition and drive to make the school the best it can be. However, there is still work to be done to sharpen the work of leaders, governors and the trust in checking some aspect of the administration of safeguarding.

Pupils enjoy learning, because teachers provide exciting and interesting opportunities across the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 2 were fascinated by a crown that had been unearthed in the school grounds and were busy writing a detailed description of it. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning, work hard and take pride in their achievements. One parent commented, 'The school is very good at making sure all pupils are included and focusing on their strengths.' As a result, pupils achieve well and in 2017 proportions of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 who achieved the expected standards improved so that they were above those seen

nationally, especially in writing and mathematics. However, senior leaders agree that there is still work to be done to enable disadvantaged pupils to achieve as well as other pupils in the school.

Although St John's is a very large school, staff know pupils well and take good care of them. Most parents agree that this is true. One said, 'I am very pleased also with the caring nature of the school as they respond to my concerns quickly.' Leaders provide pupils with many opportunities to take responsibility in such roles as peer mediators, school council, Makaton ambassadors and as young interpreters. Pupils respond by embracing these opportunities enthusiastically. The great majority of parents are happy with the school and say that they would recommend it, although some are concerned about the impact of the extensive building works and consequent increase in the size of the school.

You have responded fully to the areas for improvement highlighted in the last inspection report of the predecessor school. Teachers plan lessons based on a thorough assessment of pupils' previous learning. They provide helpful advice and targets that give pupils a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Consequently, pupils are confident, eager learners. Staff check on pupils' learning regularly and adapt the task or offer greater challenge as the need arises, so that pupils know that there is always help or an extra challenge when they need it.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, underpinned by regular training and updates in all aspects of child protection. Staff fully embrace their responsibility to protect the pupils in the school and understand how to report and record their concerns. All staff understand that even minor concerns need to be recorded as they may form part of a bigger picture of wider concerns. Senior leaders keep detailed records of concerns about pupils' welfare, and are quick to take the right actions to secure pupils' well-being. This includes engaging with social services and other agencies when the need arises.

Pupils feel safe in school. Parents and staff agree that pupils' safety is given a high priority. The curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep safe in a range of situations, including on the road and online.

Some aspects of the administration of safeguarding are not as strong as the high-quality safeguarding culture in the school. At the time of the inspection, the single central record of checks carried out on people who work in the school did not meet statutory requirements, neither did the safeguarding policy that was available on the school website. Senior leaders, governors and the academy trust have not been sufficiently thorough in carrying out checks on important safeguarding matters, and these weaknesses had not been identified. However, by the end of the inspection all the mistakes had been corrected and everyone in leadership was clear that regular checks need to be put in place immediately and carried out meticulously.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on three aspects of the school's work. The first was to look at pupils' progress and attainment in reading in key stage 2. You recognise that rates of progress in reading over the last two years have been below the national average and slower than progress in writing and mathematics. Leaders have addressed this by implementing a range of new approaches to reading. These have been successful, so pupils are now more eager to read and take pride in the number of books that they have read. Pupils are knowledgeable about books and authors and can express their opinions clearly.
- As well as increasing pupils' appetite for reading, teachers help pupils to tackle sections of quite challenging books, using such skills as inference and prediction to 'read between the lines' and gain a deeper understanding of the text. This has also helped to provide pupils with a greater vocabulary, which has served to improve their writing. Pupils' outcomes are improving this year, although attainment in reading is still slightly lower than in writing and mathematics in all year groups in key stage 2.
- Second, we investigated how well teaching enables the most able pupils to achieve greater depth at the end of key stage 1. In 2017, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics was well above national figures. However, the proportion of pupils who exceeded these standards was well below the national average. Pupils currently in key stage 1 are achieving well and a greater proportion is on track to achieve greater depth. Staff combine interesting lessons that spark pupils' curiosity with high levels of expectation and so pupils are making strong progress in all subjects. Reading has a very high profile across the school and the curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to achieve high standards in reading.
- Finally, we focused on disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. In recent years, these pupils have made much slower progress than other pupils and attained less well. Senior leaders place a high priority on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils achieve well. Leaders know each of these pupils personally and take trouble to understand each one's barriers to learning so that the right support can be put in place. Senior leaders also ensure that disadvantaged pupils are at the centre of their focus when reviewing pupils' progress in regular meetings with teachers.
- Disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make better progress so that the difference between their attainment and that of other pupils in school is narrowing, although slowly. Leaders understand that more needs to be done to diminish these differences further. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils across the school is still too low.
- The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator understands clearly how to identify pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. She understands that pupils who fall behind in their learning do not necessarily have SEN and/or disabilities. Senior leaders ensure that staff are provided with the right training to deliver specific programmes to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. There are effective approaches both in class and in intervention programmes

outside the classroom to enable these pupils to make good progress, sometimes from very low starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they perform regular checks on all aspects of the administration of safeguarding so that these arrangements are as high in quality as the culture of safeguarding found throughout the school
- strategies to improve pupils' outcomes in reading in key stage 2 are further embedded so that pupils achieve as well in reading as in writing and mathematics
- differences in progress and attainment between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally continue to diminish.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Southwark, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, the principal assistant headteacher and other middle leaders. The lead inspector had meetings with a representative of the academy trust, and two members of the governing body, including the chair. Inspectors visited classes with the deputy headteacher or the principal assistant headteacher to look at teaching and learning, talk to pupils about their work and look in their exercise books. We observed pupils' behaviour around the school and had a meeting with a small group of pupils. An inspector listened to pupils from Years 2, 4 and 6 read. Inspectors considered 14 responses to the staff survey, 102 responses to the pupil survey and 53 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents at the beginning of the day. Inspectors evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, the school improvement plan, and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.