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Mr Ian Kearns
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Dear Mr Kearns

Short inspection of St Pancras Catholic Primary School, Ipswich

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as interim headteacher in April you have ensured that the school continues to improve. You are skilled at identifying areas that are in need of further improvement and have put effective approaches in place to address them. In a very short space of time you have got to know the school very well. This also includes every pupil, whom you address by name, and who are excited to see you in the morning. Staff share your enthusiasm and love for education. As a result, they are eager to contribute to the school's improvement. Several members of staff told me that their opinion is valued and they welcome the opportunity to contribute to the school's improvement plan.

Parents are of a similar view. They state that they have seen no 'discernible difference' with the change in leadership and that it is 'business as usual' at the school. A large number of parents are strongly supportive of the school. They appreciate the care and attention paid to their children and they are pleased with their progress. Several parents commented effusively in the free-text boxes on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. These included comments such as 'a strong, loving, family-orientated school' and 'great dedicated staff who go above and beyond'. Pupils echo this view. They appreciate the time teachers give to deliver the wide variety of extra-curricular clubs.

You have created a new senior leadership team, whose members carry out their

roles effectively. They are enthusiastic about their leadership areas and know exactly the strengths and weaknesses of the school's provision. Plans for improvement are detailed, with sharp success criteria. New leaders feel well supported and are appreciative of the training provided. Leaders' work is resulting in improving outcomes and reductions in persistent absenteeism and the number of fixed-term exclusions. There is good capacity for further improvement.

Governors know the school well. They provide you with support but also offer robust challenge. They hold you and senior leaders closely to account for pupils' outcomes. For example, governors have a clear view on the most effective use of pupil premium funding. They are passionate that strong provision, such as the additional classroom support, continues. Governors keep their knowledge and skills up to date through regular training.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils remain safe. Staff are well trained and know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk. They understand the school's systems for reporting concerns and they are appreciative of the weekly discussion forum on safeguarding. Leaders accurately maintain safeguarding records and ensure that any child protection referrals are monitored closely.

Safer recruitment procedures are effective. Leaders and governors ensure that they check the suitability of adults to work with children, for instance by ensuring that suitable references are in place. Governors have a secure understanding of their safeguarding duties. Leaders and governors have strengthened the procedures for carrying out and recording checks on adults working in the school so that they fully meet current requirements.

The school's strong ethos and values promote positive relationships and mutual respect. As one Year 4 pupil told me, 'You should build bridges, not walls.' Pupils say that when they fall out with one another, teachers help them to quickly resolve problems and become friends again. Pupils say that there is little bullying and school records confirm this. On the rare occasions when bullying occurs, pupils say that teachers deal with it quickly. Pupils are well versed in how to keep safe, especially when online. Pupils were able to tell me how to stay safe when gaming and what to do regarding stranger danger.

Inspection findings

- Progress for the most able pupils in 2017 was below average in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. The previous inspection report stated that teachers were to ensure that all tasks are demanding for pupils, especially for the most able. The current work of the most able pupils shows that they are

now making good progress in their reading and mathematics.

- Leaders recognised the need for greater challenge in pupils' independent reading. They introduced a competition where pupils receive rewards for reading more demanding texts. Pupils are very enthusiastic about this scheme. For example, one Year 5 pupil spoke proudly of the fact that he read a book of 850 pages in 16 days. As a result of the scheme, pupils are being encouraged to read more frequently and read a wider variety of challenging texts.
- Pupils enjoy reading. They learn to use skills of comprehension and inference well. For example, a most-able Year 2 pupil spoke delightedly about the subtle humour he found in the text he was reading. He explained carefully to me why the phrase 'the squirrel was nutty' was so funny.
- The school has designed its own curriculum called Milestones. Pupils progress through each milestone, which is a challenging objective or skill to learn. When they have mastered one milestone, they move on to the next. Pupils are encouraged to undertake, when ready, milestones from older years. Current most-able pupils in Year 6, for instance, are working on secondary level tasks.
- Teachers have raised their expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve. Teachers observe each other to make sure that demands are high enough. As a result, they have agreed on common strategies to help pupils improve, such as modelling how to write at a higher standard, or how to form deeper interpretations of texts. Pupils say that when teachers show them exactly what to do to get to the higher standards, it really helps them to understand what is expected.
- The previous inspection noted that pupils did not have enough opportunities to develop problem-solving skills in mathematics. Leaders have acted to address this. For example, in Year 2 books, I saw a range of challenging word problems and opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding by devising their own word problems to answer. Year 4 pupils had also tackled some interesting practical mathematical problems, such as calculating the length of different shadows.
- While some teachers regularly provide effective word problems and problem-solving tasks, this is not yet consistent across key stage 2. This is also the case for extension work in mathematics. Extension tasks for the most able pupils were more evident in some books and classes than in others.
- For the past two years, progress in writing has been in the bottom 20% nationally. Boys' progress in this area is typically weaker than that of girls. Consequently, leaders have focused on improving boys' writing. Leaders make sure that staff regularly teach different forms of writing. They also ensure that all pupils have opportunities to write at length. As a result, all pupils, including boys, are now writing regularly and at length.
- Leaders introduced 'wow' moments to inspire boys with their writing and to spark their imaginations. For example, Year 6 pupils used a mock crime scene to generate investigative writing. A Year 5 pupil wrote vividly about his invention,

'The Auto Shape-Shifter 3.0', after a science day. Competitions, based on the use of information technology, have helped boys enjoy the writing process more.

- There has been a sharp focus on teaching the mechanics of writing. As a result, pupils, including boys, show control in their use of punctuation. For example, Year 2 pupils are using ellipses for effect and Year 5 pupils are demonstrating high-level skills. Teachers set a follow-up task when a pupil has made an error in their spelling and this has helped to ensure accuracy with basic spelling.
- Teachers provide lists of sophisticated words to learn to help expand pupils' range of vocabulary. Pupils write short sentences including the new vocabulary to show they have understood how to use the word. However, pupils are not routinely using this vocabulary in their longer pieces of writing. This can limit imaginative ideas or compelling non-fiction arguments, as pupils do not convey them with the flair required for the higher standard.
- Leaders have focused on closing the gap between girls' and boys' progress in mathematics. Last year, girls' progress was weaker. This is not the case currently. Performance information and a scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that girls are making good progress and in some classes they are making better progress than the boys. Girls spoke enthusiastically about their mathematics toolkit, which has helped them to understand different methods of calculation. Interactive mathematics displays in classrooms have also aided visual understanding of more difficult problems.
- Leaders have secured improvement in the early years provision. They have benefited from good support from the local authority and have addressed weaknesses with the early learning goals of understanding for communication and shape, space and measure. Adults are using vocabulary more explicitly to aid understanding as well as demonstrating exploratory play. Regular use of shape in other topics has helped reinforce children's learning. Leaders have put in place effective strategies to improve the mathematical understanding of the most able children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teachers regularly give challenging, problem-solving tasks and extension work to pupils to raise achievement further in mathematics
- pupils use sophisticated vocabulary in their longer pieces of writing in order to attain higher standards in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you and your senior leaders, middle leaders in charge of literacy, numeracy and assessment, the special educational needs coordinator and four members of the governing body, including the chair. I also spoke to parents and a representative of the local authority. I had a discussion with a group of pupils in key stage 2.

I listened to four pupils read from a range of year groups. I visited lessons in each phase of the school. You accompanied me to several of the lessons. At the time of the inspection, Year 6 pupils were visiting their secondary school placements. Other year groups were undertaking induction activities with their new teachers. I looked in detail at pupils' work from across a range of subjects in order to evaluate the progress pupils have made over time.

I took account of the 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 22 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and 11 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, its policies and other information available on the school's website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school and the quality of leadership and management, including governance. I also looked closely at the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements.