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Mr Adrian Le Cuirot  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Le Cuirot

### **Short inspection of St Helen's Catholic School**

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 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.

The information gathered during the short inspection provides evidence of the way in which you and your leaders are transforming the lives of pupils in your school. Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2017, you have made sure that systems are in place for checking the quality of teaching so that you can be sure pupils are learning well. Where there has previously been less than good teaching, you and your leaders have taken swift action to address this. As such, you have developed a newly formed teaching team that fully understands and adheres to your high expectations.

Leadership across the school is purposeful and is ensuring that you are providing support for your staff so that teaching provides a range of opportunities for pupils to learn well. This is illustrated in the newly refined reading programme that you and your leaders have developed. Pupils are reading more widely and often, which is developing their communication and language skills. Such activities are helping pupils to develop their confidence when speaking publicly as well as expanding their use of vocabulary. In this way, they are given the best opportunities to learn, despite any barriers.

Governors are keen for the pupils to achieve and succeed. They regularly visit the school and take an interest in what you and your leaders are doing to help pupils learn. However, they do not routinely ask the correct questions when challenging

school leaders. This means that governors are not sufficiently effective in supporting improvements across the school

You and your leaders have worked effectively on the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. Having evaluated the school, you are aware of what needs to be done. As an example, you are making improvements in the teaching of reading across the school.

Pupils say that they 'absolutely love coming to school' and, 'it is a wonderful place to learn'. They particularly like the learning opportunities in assemblies when they feel they can express themselves and learn together with their friends.

All parents and carers who responded to the online survey, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to other parents. They also said that they believe the school is well led and managed and, furthermore, that they receive valuable information about the progress their child is making.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders make sure that safeguarding is given the highest priority across the school. You and your leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There are robust systems in place for checking the suitability of adults who work in the school. Governors review the impact of the safeguarding policy routinely.

All staff receive the appropriate training so that they are aware to how to look after pupils well. You and your leaders have made sure that the right amount of care and support is provided for pupils, especially the most vulnerable.

Pupils are taught how to look after themselves and they know how to keep themselves safe, including on the internet. They typically say that adults help them to stay safe in and outside school.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed to focus on three key lines of enquiry, in addition to checking the arrangements for safeguarding.
- The first area of focus was to evaluate the breadth and depth of the school's curriculum. Leaders have recognised this as an area in which they have supported teachers. Clear improvements have been seen in the reading curriculum. This is particularly since the decline in reading outcomes for some groups of pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. However, information on the website does not provide enough information about the progress pupils make in reading.
- There has been a focus on the investment in a wide range of reading materials that have been made accessible to pupils in their classrooms. The book corners

provide a range of appropriate reading material that is exciting and engaging. These areas are stimulating and are used routinely as part of the teaching in lessons. Pupils are helped by adults to develop their reading skills. In most cases, pupils are learning how to comprehend and make inferences from the texts they have been provided with.

- Pupils are given opportunities to read more often to develop their fluency. This was seen, for example, when pupils were asked to develop a passage from a book. They did this by adding phrases and more specific vocabulary and then reading this out loud to the class.
- However, the adult support that is provided alongside the teaching does not sufficiently enable pupils to develop their reading skills appropriately.
- The second area of focus was to review the action you and your leaders are taking to ensure that disadvantaged pupils progress well in all subjects, but especially in mathematics.
- Most notably, the outcomes in mathematics for disadvantaged pupils who left the school in July 2018 have declined since the previous year.
- In lessons, there were examples where teaching is helping pupils to solve problems because of the effective ways that questions are being asked. In this way, it is helping pupils to think about their work and is also challenging them to develop their reasoning skills.
- However, from the review of work in books and the support being provided for disadvantaged pupils in lessons, the inspector judged that this group of pupils do not consistently make the same rate of progress as other pupils. This is because the learning activities are not always closely matched to the needs of disadvantaged pupils. In addition, the support provided for them does not effectively ensure that they are learning as well as they could.
- You and your leaders are aware of this and are in the process of developing a training programme for staff to provide focused support for the good-quality teaching that is taking place. You are reviewing the work of all adults who support disadvantaged pupils. This is to make sure that intervention provides the best help for pupils who are either falling behind or need to be further challenged, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- The third area of focus was to determine how effectively leaders use additional funds to improve pupils' achievement. It was also to evaluate what leaders know about the impact of the curriculum on the progress that pupils are making, especially in reading and mathematics.
- You and your newly formed leadership team recognise the need for checking the impact of teaching across the school.
- You and your leaders are passionate about making sure the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils. This is illustrated by your robust systems for checking what pupils are learning and how much progress they are making. You have a clear plan for developing teaching, so that disadvantaged pupils can be given the same opportunities as all pupils to make progress.
- In addition to this, your systems for checking clearly identify how some teaching

support is not always helping pupils to develop their reading and problem-solving skills in mathematics. This has enabled you to address this quickly, so that the curriculum can meet the needs of all pupils.

- Governors are aware of the systems you are using and are supportive of this. However, school leaders are only just beginning to make governors aware of how best to use assessment information so that they can challenge the work of leaders as part of their support for the school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater emphasis placed on how pupils are being supported with their reading during lessons and intervention sessions
- governors have a clearer understanding about assessment information, so that they can appropriately challenge school leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Ogugua Okolo-Angus  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I held discussions with you, senior leaders and governors about the school and the actions taken to continue to improve it. I met with leaders to discuss their roles in continuing to develop their subject areas. I observed the work in classes during learning walks which took place across the school with members of the senior leadership team. Samples of pupils' work were reviewed, as well as assessment systems and curriculum information. I spoke with a group of pupils and analysed a range of school documents linked to the school's self-evaluation, improvement priorities and safeguarding. I looked at nine responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.