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Miss Amanda McCluskey
Headteacher
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Dear Miss McCluskey

Short inspection of St Peter's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 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 September 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 the last inspection some changes have been made to the leadership team, so that there is now a deputy and an assistant headteacher to assist you in leading the school, along with new leaders of English and mathematics. Together, you work with determination to establish high and consistent expectations for the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Christian values are at the centre of your ethos, ensuring that staff and pupils create a caring and inclusive community.

Governors have also reorganised their work since the last inspection so that it is more effective. Led by a new chair of the governing body, governors act as your critical friend. They make sure that you are focused sharply on ensuring that pupils make good progress, are well behaved and are safe.

Collectively, you, leaders and governors, have an accurate understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school. You have responded successfully to the areas we asked you to address at the last inspection. For example, you have raised standards in mathematics so that they are consistently in line with national averages, and teaching now focuses on making sure that the most able pupils are stretched in their learning. You recognise that, over time, writing has not been as strong it should be. Changes made over the last year have led to improvements for current pupils, although these changes have yet to be embedded fully. Last year there was a dip in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent), which you have

addressed through reorganising how phonics is taught. This reorganisation is working. A higher proportion of pupils are on track to meet the expected standards of the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1. You are acutely aware that some pupils, including some boys and some pupils who join the school part-way through a key stage, have not made enough progress in the past. Some actions have already been taken to raise outcomes for these pupils, although these improvements have yet to be demonstrated consistently.

Pupils are happy, well behaved and friendly. In lessons they cooperate well with each other. They benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum which includes numerous opportunities for pupils to develop their learning in an exciting way. For example, during my visit Year 3 pupils attended a 'Lego workshop', and a recent trip to St Albans helped pupils understand life in Roman times. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. I saw pupils enjoying practising for the forthcoming school nativity; everyone joined in and sang beautifully. Pupils participate in a range of extra-curricular activities such as cookery, film, and football clubs. Pupils like their school. They appreciate the good teaching they receive, and the friends they make.

The majority of parents are happy with the school. Although a minority expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour and bullying, most were full of praise for the school, highlighting the caring ethos, the quality of teaching and the approachability of leaders and staff. One typified the views of many by writing: 'This school has great values and integrity. Our children love learning thanks to the passionate and caring staff.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They are confident that an adult will listen and help if they have any worries. The curriculum regularly provides pupils with opportunities to learn about staying safe. For example, they learn about road safety and e-safety.

Leaders and governors have made sure that staff are well trained in child protection and that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff know the signs which may indicate neglect or abuse and know how to report any concerns they may have. Leaders follow up any concerns tenaciously, including by using outside agencies where necessary. Recruitment checks on the suitability of staff working in the school are thorough and recorded accurately on the single central record.

Inspection findings

- Over time, pupils have not made enough progress in writing. You have reflected carefully on why pupils underperform in writing and, after taking advice and conducting useful research, you have identified a number of necessary improvements. These include: ensuring that pupils have access to rich reading texts which model good writing and enthuse pupils to write; improving your approach to how pupils plan their writing; providing pupils with more frequent

opportunities to write; making sure that pupils know how to edit their work; and ensuring a consistent approach to spelling across the school.

- You have this year begun to implement these changes, and writing has already rapidly improved. Pupils told me that they are enjoying the texts they are studying, such as 'The iron man' and 'Street child', and showed me the work they have been inspired to produce after reading them. Pupils' books show that they are planning their writing well, writing more frequently and to a much better standard than before. Nevertheless, you recognise the need to maintain your focus on writing, including by supporting the new leader of English in her work to monitor the quality of teaching of writing and to model good practice. Furthermore, you have not yet addressed the necessary improvements to spelling, although this is planned for January.
- A minority of parents expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour. Your ethos, based on the Christian values of the school, means that you take an inclusive and sensitive approach to behaviour management. I observed polite, engaged pupils, both in lessons and around the school. Pupils are rewarded for good behaviour and good work. You demonstrated that you deal effectively with any incidents of poor behaviour. 'Reflection' sessions help pupils learn how to handle difficult emotions and situations so as to improve their future conduct. Staff take particular care to support the needs of pupils who struggle significantly to moderate their behaviour, including by making appropriate use of advice from external agencies. Consequently, your effective work means that pupils' behaviour remains good. However, the organisation of behaviour records could be sharper.
- I also looked at the school's approach to bullying. Pupils have a clear understanding of bullying, explaining that it is 'ongoing unkindness and on purpose'. They told me that, although occasionally pupils might fall out, 'we're usually friends again the next day', and that bullying itself is rare. Through activities such as 'anti-bullying week', and a recent visit to the theatre to learn about e-safety and cyber bullying, pupils learn what to do if they do experience bullying. Although a small number of parents felt that leaders do not deal with this issue well, this view was not reflected by the pupils themselves. Pupils were very clear what to do if they or a friend were bullied, and are confident an adult would help them.
- I considered leaders' actions to make sure that boys' progress improved, because in the past it has sometimes not been as strong as that of girls. You have made several improvements to the curriculum to help boys to make better progress. A choice of challenges in mathematics is encouraging boys to complete harder work successfully. You have made sure that the topics studied as part of the 'creative curriculum' appeal to boys as well as girls. In the early years, numerous opportunities to develop children's early writing skills are provided in the outside areas. These are especially encouraging boys to learn to write. Pupils' work shows that these actions are working and boys' progress is improving.
- An increasing proportion of pupils join your school part-way through a year or key stage. I met with a number of such pupils, who all told me that they felt really welcome and that they quickly made friends. Parents also commented on

how successfully their children settled into their new school. However, some of these pupils do not make as much progress as their peers. This is because leaders have not checked pupils' different starting points carefully enough, or put in place enough effective support to help those who need it to catch up rapidly with their peers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing continues to accelerate, by:
 - embedding work already begun to improve the quality of pupils' writing
 - ensuring that a consistent approach to teaching spelling is applied across the school
 - supporting new middle leaders in their strategic role to support improvements to teaching and learning
- leaders check systematically the progress of different groups of pupils and intervene quickly to minimise differences where necessary.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I observed learning throughout the school with senior leaders. I met with you and your deputy headteacher throughout the inspection to discuss your self-evaluation of the school. I met with the leaders of English and mathematics to examine pupils' work. I also spoke with other staff during the day. I met with governors, and spoke on the telephone to a representative of the local authority. I also looked at a selection of pupils' work with you. I spoke with pupils during lessons and at playtimes, and met with a group of pupils from key stage 2. I took account of the 20 responses to the staff survey. I spoke with parents on the playground before school started, and considered the 86 responses submitted to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including 82 free-text responses.