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Mrs Ashlie Hughes
Headteacher
St Clere's School
Butts Lane
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Dear Mrs Hughes

Short inspection of St Clere's School

Following my visit to the school on 27 November 2018 with Karen Kerridge and Paul Lawrence, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 previous inspection.

You have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. Teachers now often match the work pupils do closely to their abilities. They use their assessment of pupils' understanding to ensure that what pupils do builds well on what they already know and understand. This leads to pupils typically making good progress from their starting points.

You and other leaders have established a culture where being different is fully accepted. Pupils who spoke with inspectors told them of the school's 'LGBTQ+ club'. They were clear that it is a school in which people with different backgrounds, beliefs or personal characteristics are treated with respect. Almost all of those who responded to Ofsted's survey of pupils' views agreed that the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally.

You are proud of the fact that staff morale is high. You cite low staff turnover as evidence of this and your view is supported by the outcomes of Ofsted's staff survey. A clear majority of those who completed this feel that leaders do all they can to ensure the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff. A common feature in the comments staff made was about the efforts leaders are making to reduce their workload. They recognise your high expectations, but value your awareness of, and support for, their well-being.

Parents are also positive about the school. Those who responded to Ofsted's online survey of their views, Parent View, commended many aspects of the school's work and 94% of them would recommend the school to others. They recognise the impact of your recent change to the way homework is set, with most parents saying that their child receives appropriate homework for their age.

Governors and trustees support you well in leading the school. They review the impact of your work and ask probing questions about pertinent issues. Governors and trustees bring relevant experience which enhances the leadership of the school. They are ambitious for pupils, know the strengths and weaknesses of provision well and challenge you effectively to ensure your work continues to make the school better.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders maintain an effective record of pre-employment checks on adults who work in the school and ensure that staff training is up to date. You follow up on concerns raised about the well-being of pupils quickly, involving other agencies as appropriate. You teach pupils to keep safe through, for example, citizenship and personal development lessons. Pupils were able to tell inspectors about what they had learned.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that bullying is unusual. If it does happen, they are confident that staff will deal with it well. This view was echoed in Ofsted's pupil survey. Most of those who responded stated either that bullying does not happen or that, if it does, teachers deal with it well.

The inspection took place during a period in which safeguarding records were being transferred from a paper-based to an electronic system. The paper-based system contains sufficient information and this information is accessible. However, some of the paper files are not as well organised as they could be. As a result of both of these things, there was some difficulty during the inspection in locating some safeguarding information quickly. Leaders were able to demonstrate that record-keeping is effective in underpinning pupils' safety, but some information is not as accessible as it could be.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors wanted to find out whether current pupils make good progress across the curriculum. This was because the provisional information about 2018 key stage 4 results indicated a drop in performance across several subjects. In particular, pupils' progress in the group of subjects which make up the English Baccalaureate was of concern.
- You and other leaders have a good understanding of why science results were weaker in 2018 than in the past. You are also aware of weaknesses in language provision over time. You have already taken actions to improve these and inspectors saw some examples of effective practice in both subject areas.

However, there are still aspects of teaching in science and languages which are not as strong as they should be.

- You also identified a need to improve standards in geography and have taken effective steps to do so. The progress that pupils now make in geography is better than it was last year. In art, too, you found that outcomes in 2018 were not as strong as in the past and have rectified this. Teachers of art combine high expectations with accurate assessment to ensure that pupils take on work which is appropriately challenging.
- You wanted to mirror the consistently high standards from mathematics in English. This has been a success. Leaders and teachers of English now make sure that work builds well on pupils' prior learning.
- Our next line of enquiry related to how well you and staff across the school meet the needs of groups of pupils. In 2018, boys and pupils with high starting points did not make as much progress as others in the school. Over time, the progress that disadvantaged pupils make has been variable. In 2018, they made less progress than other pupils nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils' needs are understood and met well. They benefit from individual mentors, high expectations, targeted work-experience and collaboration between the school and their parents. There were specific issues which had a negative effect on the outcomes of some disadvantaged pupils in 2018 which do not apply to pupils in the school now. Disadvantaged pupils work well in lessons and make good progress over time.
- Expectations across the school are high. Work is often tailored to individuals based on their starting points and progress to date. As a consequence, the most able pupils are supported well, and they make good progress from their starting points. Boys also respond well to these high expectations. They typically work well and make good progress.
- The final area inspectors wanted to clarify was whether leaders have the capacity to maintain the good quality of education evident in the previous inspection. Outcomes in 2018 fell at the same time that leaders were providing support to other schools. We wanted to be sure that you and other leaders were fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of this school and taking effective action to continue to improve it.
- Leaders across the school, including governors and trustees, demonstrate a strong capacity for sustained improvement. You and they have a clear understanding of what is working well and what is not. Between you, you take prompt and effective action to address areas of weakness. You have detailed improvement plans based on a solid understanding of what has happened in the past. You act on these and make sure that your actions are effective. Governors and trustees hold you to account for your work. Middle leaders are focused on what their departments do well and on what needs to be done better. They are successful in their work to develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Your and other leaders' work has a clear impact on maintaining and improving standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the system of maintaining safeguarding records is improved so that the precise location of information is clearer, making it easier to access by authorised individuals
- teaching is of a consistently high standard, particularly in languages and science, so that pupils make strong progress across all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Thurrock. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors spoke with you, other leaders, trustees, governors and staff. We visited parts of 32 lessons, accompanied by leaders, and reviewed pupils' work in their books. Inspectors looked at information about pupils' progress and reviewed a range of documentation relating to the school's self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding arrangements. We reviewed minutes of governing body meetings.

Inspectors considered the 156 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 113 responses from parents to the free-text option. We also considered the 80 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 70 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils during their lunchtime to hear their views.