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Mrs Natalie Holden  
Headteacher  
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Essex  
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Dear Mrs Holden

### **Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 29 January 2019, 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 December 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have worked in close partnership with an executive headteacher, governors and staff to create a welcoming school. Pupils enjoy their learning and feel well supported. Attendance is above the national average. You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have given priority to developing the role of middle leaders across the school. Teachers told me that they appreciate the coaching and training opportunities being provided for them.

You and senior leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers are now given specific and detailed guidance on how to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Planning for English and mathematics lessons has been strengthened to take into account the progress of different groups of pupils.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's priorities. They provide a good balance of challenge and support through their questioning and analysis of information. They share leaders' high expectations.

Leaders' commitment to inclusion is demonstrated by the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils with complex needs

are supported well and play a full part in the life of the school.

Pupils are polite and are rightly proud of their school. The new pupil 'ambassadors' in every class are articulate and eagerly spoke to me about their learning. Parents, carers and pupils all say that behaviour is good in the school and that instances of bullying are rare and well dealt with. This is because of the strong pastoral care and support systems that are in place. Leaders are aware of individual pupils' needs and concerns, and parents acknowledge and appreciate this.

Most pupils make strong progress in reading and particularly strong progress in writing and mathematics. However, some pupils with higher starting points – including disadvantaged pupils – do not make the progress necessary to attain the higher standards in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. This was one of my lines of enquiry for the inspection.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The single central record is maintained to a high standard. Case studies show that the school takes prompt action to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils. Governors are proactive in ensuring that safeguarding is effective. They regularly check the single central record and employment checks of staff who work in the school. Training is kept up to date and ensures that staff have a good awareness of local issues within the community. Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding within the school.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they understand how to keep safe online. Leaders have made good links with parents and a range of external agencies to provide support for vulnerable pupils.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus on pupils' achievement in writing and what steps the school is taking to maintain the strong progress made in the previous three years. In both the 2017 and 2018 writing assessments, pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 was well above that of other pupils nationally.
- The school has a strong focus on developing pupils' writing skills from the outset. In the early years, we saw teachers helping children to improve their letter formation and mark-making skills. Pupils in Year 1 confidently apply their phonics knowledge to read new words and write simple sentences. By Year 2, pupils are beginning to write in different styles, including reviewing books and analysing texts.
- In key stage 2, pupils' books show that they are developing their vocabulary skills and applying these to their writing. They have plenty of opportunities to

write at length and in a variety of genres. In Year 6, pupils told me that they are proud of their extended writing books, where they draft and edit their work. Pupils are keen authors and said how much they now enjoy writing in school. We saw examples of persuasive writing and poetry being recorded in their writing books. Pupils also showed their skills in writing imaginative stories, drama and narratives in upper key stage 2.

- We next looked at the action leaders are taking to increase the proportions of pupils – including disadvantaged pupils – attaining the higher standards in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. For the last three years, pupils with high prior attainment in key stage 1 made less progress in key stage 2 than other pupils, particularly in reading and mathematics. You and governors had identified this as a key area for improvement.
- The school has worked in close partnership with its two federation schools to raise standards in reading and writing. Staff training has been provided for teachers and support staff to develop their skills in the teaching of reading and to promote high levels of challenge in the classroom. This has supported the recently introduced initiatives and programmes to develop reading and higher comprehension skills in key stage 2.
- Regular scrutiny of English books enables leaders to give guidance to teachers on how to accelerate pupils' progress. This has led to well-targeted interventions for key groups, including for the most able pupils. Pupil premium money is well targeted and systems are in place to evaluate outcomes and impact.
- While there are signs that these actions are starting to bring about improvement, you recognise that more needs to be done to continue to ensure that more pupils – including disadvantaged pupils – attain the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly at the end of key stage 2.
- Finally, I focused on the school's work to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils in the school. I noted the detailed curriculum maps on the school's website, and the expectations for the humanities, science and computing. I wanted to explore how these are translated into practice.
- Children in Nursery and Reception are provided with a wide range of enjoyable experiences that support their progress in all of the early learning goals.
- Your own analysis of the curriculum in key stages 1 and 2 identified weaknesses in meeting the specific needs of the pupils. My own review of work in pupils' books and discussion with them showed that – with the exception of Years 5 and 6 – pupils do not have the opportunity to study a range of subjects in sufficient depth. In both key stages, pupils do not make strong progress in gaining knowledge and skills in subjects including science, geography and history. Additionally, the development of writing in these subjects is weak. You have plans to address these weaknesses.
- In contrast to this, curriculum provision in Years 5 and 6 is stronger. For example, pupils I spoke to in Year 6 were able to discuss their understanding of the voyages of Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. Pupils spoke with

sensitivity about the Holocaust and the history of the Second World War. Displays of pupils' work in Years 5 and 6 are of a high standard and show examples of imaginative writing in history and investigation work in science.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils – including disadvantaged pupils – achieve the higher standards in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2
- the curriculum is extended in Years 1 to 4 to provide opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in science and the humanities.

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

Yours sincerely

Sean Flood  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I held discussions with you and other senior and middle leaders. I spoke with a representative from the local authority and held a meeting with the chair of governors. I spoke with pupils in class, in structured settings and informally. I also spoke to parents. I observed pupils' behaviour in class, on the playground and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised pupils' work in a wide range of subjects. I heard readers across the school and spoke with pupils about the books they are reading. I also visited the Nursery. I made visits to all classes alongside senior leaders. I examined the school's progress tracking information and assessment records. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation related to safeguarding, welfare and attendance. I looked at behaviour and bullying incident logs. I considered the responses of 36 parents to Parent View, and the responses of staff to Ofsted's online survey and the school's own internal surveys.