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Mrs Sue Collins
Executive Headteacher
St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Collins

Short inspection of St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

You took up the role of interim executive headteacher in January 2019, following the retirement of the substantive headteacher in July 2018. A previous interim executive headteacher led the school temporarily from September to December 2018. Parents and staff have, therefore, experienced two changes of leadership, which has unsettled them. Parents have expressed concerns about the stability of leadership. You have agreed to stay in post until the end of this year, when it is hoped that a new substantive headteacher can be appointed. During the interim period you are providing effective leadership and maintaining a good quality of education.

You have taken effective steps to settle the staff and provide a clear sense of direction for the school. Staff say that the school is effectively led and managed and that they value the professional development opportunities that they are given to improve their teaching. Most say that the school has improved since it was last inspected. Parents, however, have a mixed view. Many parents told me that their children are happy and doing well at school. One parent told me that the school has a lovely family feel to it and said, 'It feels like a second home.' Several parents expressed concerns about the current lack of a full-time substantive headteacher. Some feel that communications are poor and arrangements for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not as well managed as they should be. You recognise that most of your work so far has been focused on

ensuring a high-quality education for pupils and that there is more to do to communicate effectively with parents.

Since taking up the leadership, you have successfully focused on ensuring a consistently strong quality of teaching throughout the school. The quality of education the school provides continues to be good. You have enabled teachers from St Ethelbert's to work collaboratively with teachers from your other two primary schools, in order to further develop their professional skills. You have seconded an assistant headteacher to work with staff in the early years and key stage 1, particularly to strengthen the teaching of phonics, reading and writing. Leaders have introduced effective new approaches to the teaching of mathematics. Pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills have developed significantly as a result of the new initiatives in mathematics. Pupils' understanding of mathematics and their ability to explain their thinking have improved significantly. All of the initiatives that have been introduced are having a beneficial impact on pupils' learning and progress.

You have also introduced new approaches to teaching subjects beyond English and mathematics through well-planned, engaging topics. These are inspiring pupils, who told me that they particularly enjoy their topic-based learning. The knowledge and vocabulary that they gain from these experiences are strengthening their writing skills, particularly in key stage 1.

Leaders have altered the approach to the use of assessment information, so that teachers are more focused than previously on individual pupils' progress, particularly the most vulnerable. This is having a beneficial effect for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, most of whom are making strong rates of progress and catching up with other pupils nationally. Pupils with SEND are well supported in class, by teachers, teaching assistants and the use of a range of resources to aid their learning. You have undertaken an audit of the provision for pupils with SEND in order to strengthen it. Improvements in this aspect of the school's work have not yet been fully communicated to parents.

While parents have expressed some specific concerns about the school, they value the friendly, family feel it provides. Pupils enjoy their learning and feel safe at school. They say that they know that they are doing well and making good progress. Pupils are motivated, attentive and behave well during lessons. Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong. Pupils are articulate, self-assured and very welcoming towards visitors. Teachers target their support and challenge for pupils well, based on their clear understanding of individual needs. Pupils say that they are mostly free from bullying, but when it does occur, they feel that staff resolve incidents quickly. Pupils feel confident that there is an adult at school that they can talk to if something is worrying them. They know how to keep themselves safe, both within and beyond the school, including when they use the internet.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have maintained robust and well-established procedures and policies to keep pupils safe. The single central record of recruitment checks ensures that new staff are

thoroughly vetted before taking up their appointments. The designated safeguarding leads (DSL) have been appropriately trained and have the expertise to provide training for other members of the staff. Staff are vigilant and have a well-developed understanding of potential risks posed to pupils both in school and in the wider community. They know, and follow, the school's procedures for making referrals when they have a concern about a pupil's well-being. These are followed up swiftly by the DSLs. The DSLs maintain thorough and timely records of referrals they receive. They work well with outside agencies, such as children's services, to make sure that pupils who may be at risk of harm receive the support that they need. Liaison with external agencies is robust and referrals are promptly followed up.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have taken effective action to ensure that a consistently strong quality of teaching is maintained throughout the school. This has included improved approaches to supporting and monitoring the progress of targeted pupils such as disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. These pupils are making strong rates of progress as a result of this renewed focus. The revised approaches to the use of assessment that have been implemented underpin this work effectively. Teachers allow pupils the right amount of thinking time before answering questions. They monitor and analyse pupils' progress carefully, adjusting teaching to move learning forward effectively. While the quality of teaching is good, new initiatives are not yet fully embedded in all areas of the curriculum.
- Leaders are aware that in 2018 the progress of disadvantaged pupils dipped compared to that of other pupils. Leaders are making well planned, focused use of pupil premium funding to ensure that this group of pupils make strong progress and catch up with other pupils nationally. The emphasis on ensuring highly effective teaching, as well as the additional support strategies that have been put in place, are benefiting these pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are well supported and make strong progress. Disadvantaged pupils are catching up well with other pupils nationally. The new initiatives in the teaching of phonics, writing and mathematics, together with an improved use of assessment, are effectively supporting this group of pupils. Teachers understand their needs well and provide the right level of support and challenge to enable strong rates of progress.
- Initiatives in the teaching of phonics, writing and spelling in key stage 1 are building pupils' learning successfully. Together with the introduction of engaging new topics, which have inspired pupils, these initiatives support pupils to write meaningfully and accurately, using a range of vocabulary. An emphasis on developing writing skills in key stage 1 is also enabling disadvantaged pupils to make strong progress and catch up where necessary. Classroom displays effectively support pupils' use of phonics and spelling strategies, enabling them to become increasingly accurate over time.
- Teachers assess pupils' work accurately and provide helpful feedback so that pupils can improve their written work. Pupils actively revise and improve their writing in response to the feedback that they receive. Pupils read confidently and are developing a range of strategies to read independently. Early readers use

their phonic knowledge well to decode and blend sounds to read unfamiliar words. Teachers provide the right level of challenge to move pupils' reading forward. Pupils say that they enjoy their reading, and most read often. Older pupils read widely and express well-informed preferences in their choice of books and authors.

- Leaders have introduced a new approach to the teaching of mathematics. This has improved pupils' understanding of, and ability to explain, mathematical concepts. Pupils are able to justify answers, explain their reasoning, and select from a range of pictorial and physical representations to help them solve problems. Pupils are making strong progress in mathematics, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Higher-attaining pupils, however, are not always challenged enough to develop their mathematical thinking.
- Mathematics teaching has been effectively developed, through the training and support that teachers have received from leaders. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and make skilful use of questions to probe and develop pupils' understanding. They plan and adapt tasks to ensure the right level of challenge and support, based on pupils' prior learning. While the majority of pupils build up their knowledge, skills and understanding in mathematics well, some, particularly the most able, are not always moved on fast enough.
- Governors are aware that the school has gone through an unsettled period. They are aware that staff were unsettled by the changes in leadership, and that parents have expressed concerns about the temporary leadership arrangements. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and monitor progress carefully and regularly. They rightly say that the school has moved forward significantly since January and are anxious to embed fully the improvements that have been made.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- initiatives to maintain consistently high-quality teaching and strong rates of progress for pupils are fully established in all areas of the curriculum
- communications with parents are improved so that they are kept fully informed of developments, including those relating to the provision for pupils with SEND.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Wibroe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with the interim executive headteacher, deputy headteacher and seconded assistant headteacher. I also met with middle leaders with responsibility for English and mathematics, the designated safeguarding leads, and a group of governors, including the chair. A representative of the Archdiocese of Southwark, and the local authority school improvement adviser working with the school, spoke to me. Together with senior leaders, I visited lessons, observing learning, and looked at pupils' work in their books. Pupils were spoken to in lessons and a discussion with a group of pupils was held in the library. I held conversations with parents at the beginning of the school day. Twenty-seven responses to Parent View, Ofsted's survey, and 25 free-text responses were reviewed. Twenty responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 115 responses to its pupil survey were also reviewed. I considered a range of school documentation, including its self-evaluation, development plan, a range of policies, and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection. Pupils' attainment and rates of progress were taken into consideration.