

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



23 February 2018

Mrs Clare Redmond
Executive Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School
Romany Road
Rainham
Gillingham
Kent
ME8 6JH

Dear Mrs Redmond

Short inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the last inspection. When you took up post, you quickly identified the school's strengths and next steps for development. You worked diligently with your deputy to ensure that the school's self-evaluation was accurate and actions for further improvement were precise and targeted. You have built quickly positive relationships with your staff, who share your commitment and high expectations. They are motivated and proud to be members of the school community. Governors work strategically and have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They regularly visit the school and provide helpful support and challenge for senior leaders.

Pupils are very happy at school and have exemplary attitudes to learning. They are polite and respectful towards each other, adults and visitors to the school. I observed pupils applying themselves diligently to tasks during lessons and sharing confidently their ideas and opinions during a lively class debate. Pupils describe their school as a place where 'everyone is friendly', and where teachers help them learn and understand the things that they find difficult. Pupils are positive about their curriculum and say that learning is fun. They talked enthusiastically about their favourite learning experiences. For example, one pupil described dressing up as Julius Caesar during their topic about the Romans, while another shared their enjoyment of making animals out of recycled material, linked to their key text in literacy.

Parents are extremely positive about the school. Those that I spoke to on the

playground were supportive of the school staff and were happy with the education that their children receive. They commented that leaders and teachers listen to them and respond quickly if they have concerns. All parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, felt that their children were happy in school and the vast majority said that they would recommend the school to others. One parent praised the school for its 'high morals and positive influences'. Another commented that 'school has a reassuring sense of community and encourages the children to think about each other and the wider school family.' The vast majority of parents feel that the school is led and managed well.

Following the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve teaching and develop opportunities for high-quality writing. Inspectors also asked leaders to provide pupils with more opportunities to identify their own next steps in learning. During this inspection, pupils talked with excitement about a wide variety of topics that they enjoyed in school. I observed detailed and focused writing in English books, as well as in a broader range of subjects and topic books. Additionally, I saw evidence of this in English, where pupils self-evaluate their writing to ensure that it includes features expected for their stage of learning. Leaders' focus on the development of writing has had a positive impact on pupils' attainment. In 2017, the proportion of pupils in Year 2 and in Year 6 who achieved well was better than that of all pupils nationally.

Leaders were also asked to ensure that all pupils were given appropriately challenging tasks. Much work has been done to address this and your current school development plan outlines further clear actions. However, you rightly acknowledge that additional improvement is required to enable the most able pupils in key stage 2 to exceed the expectations set for their age. Leaders are keen to keep improving all aspects of the school. You are currently focusing on improving the attendance of all pupils by working with parents to highlight the importance of pupils attending school regularly.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and thorough. Staff and governors receive regular training, which enables them to put in place the most up-to-date safeguarding requirements. As a result, pupils are safe in school. Policies and procedures provide clear guidance to staff, including arrangements for reporting concerns. Governors take their responsibilities to safeguard pupils seriously. The chair of governors checks the school's procedures for vetting and recruitment regularly. The school's records show that all checks on staff, governors and volunteers are completed meticulously.

Pupils talked confidently about how the school teaches them to keep them safe. For example, they recalled lessons on online safety, fire safety guidance and a recent assembly delivered by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. They were clear about what they would do if they had a concern. All pupils with whom I spoke agreed that they would be happy to talk to any adult in the school.

Pupils say that behaviour is good. They describe their school as a place where 'friends look after each other'. Consequently, bullying is rare. Pupils were able also to meaningfully define bullying and were confident in what they would do if it occurred.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I evaluated: what actions leaders are taking to ensure that pupils make the same rapid progress in writing and mathematics as they do in reading in key stage 2; the achievement of the most able pupils; the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils; and the impact of leaders' actions on improving attendance and reducing persistent absence.
- Teachers have high expectations for the quality of pupils' work. As a result, pupils take great pride in their learning. Leaders and teachers know their pupils well. Systems to track pupils' progress are thorough and leaders regularly monitor the performance of all groups of pupils. Leaders identified that pupils in key stage 2 make less progress in writing and mathematics than they do in reading. As a result, leaders have implemented new approaches to the teaching of English and mathematics and all teachers have benefited from targeted training. School assessment information indicates that current pupils are now making strong progress in writing and mathematics from their starting points. Work seen in pupils' books provides further evidence that progress in these areas is rapid.
- In key stage 2, some most able pupils do not achieve the highest standards in reading and writing. Leaders have rightly identified that this group of pupils require a greater level of challenge in reading and writing. Detailed and precise action plans for improvement have already begun to have a positive impact on the progress of this group of learners.
- Leaders and governors make effective use of the school's pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils' learning and achievements. Teachers ensure that they plan carefully for the needs of these pupils. Additional adults are deployed effectively. As a result, current disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points. Clear progress could be seen in the English and mathematics workbooks scrutinised during the inspection. School assessment information for reading, writing and mathematics indicates that disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their classmates and in some year groups and subjects exceed expectations.
- Leaders have recently introduced new strategies to improve attendance. You track pupils' attendance rigorously and work closely with families and external agencies where necessary. These actions are beginning to reduce some pupils' high rates of absence. However, attendance levels are still lower than average and some groups of pupils continue to miss too much school. Therefore, you are right in ensuring that this remains a school priority.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in key stage 2, teaching of reading and writing provides greater challenge for pupils, particularly for those who are most able, so that a higher proportion exceed expectations for their age
- attendance and persistent absence rates continue to improve, particularly for those pupils who are disadvantaged.

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

Yours sincerely

Luisa Gould
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and a group of governors. I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. We discussed and agreed the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. Jointly, we undertook a learning walk in key stage 2. I reviewed a range of English, mathematics and topic books, as well some books in other subjects. We discussed the school's assessment information about outcomes for current pupils, your plans for improvement and your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I considered 32 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and took account of comments of the parents that I met and of those who responded to free-text. I analysed a range of school documentation, including policies and procedures, local authority monitoring reports and minutes from governing body meetings. I met with your office manager to review the pre-employment checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children. I checked other safeguarding documentation and procedures.