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Mrs Margaret Wilson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wilson

Short inspection of St Bernard's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 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 October 2012.

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 led the school through a period of significant growth in pupil numbers, particularly of those who speak English as an additional language. There has been a significant turnover in teachers. In recent years, you have had a drive on improving pupils' depth of understanding through the school's 'mastery approach'. This has been an integral part of the wider reform of the curriculum, which is enhanced through sport, forest school and 'global learning'.

The vast majority of parents and pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires would recommend the school to others. Parents particularly comment on the good relationships they have with staff members and that staff members know their children well. As one parent, typical of many, wrote, 'St Bernard's is a small friendly school, with a family feel.' This was seen during this inspection.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to challenge pupils in Years 1 and 2 so they made stronger progress. You have ensured that teachers plan learning that is more demanding of pupils and have put in place support to build pupils' resilience. You were also asked to ensure that pupils in Years 3 and 4 were clear about the next steps in their learning. The refinements you have made to your assessment strategy, particularly a more developmental approach, are helping pupils to see how they can improve their work. The third area you were charged with improving in 2012 was increasing the skills of new leaders and governors. A new leadership structure has been introduced and work with other schools in the Newman Partnership (a group of Roman Catholic schools in the Bristol area) is

helping leaders to develop their skills. New governors have brought a wide range of expertise, for example in accountancy and education, which they use well to evaluate the school's performance. Governors have invested in regular external evaluations of the school's performance which is giving them an accurate and precise understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are safe. Every pupil who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire reported that they feel safe. Pupils who spoke to me reiterated this and parents also share this view. Governors have invested in ensuring that the site is well maintained and that security is tight.

You, as the designated safeguarding leader, and your deputy leader, are clear about your roles and responsibilities. You are both trained and have a clear understanding of the local authority's threshold for intervention and the systems used. Child protection records are maintained carefully and show your effective work with a range of agencies to keep pupils safe. You have trained members of staff in all aspects of safeguarding, including the risks that pupils can face from online grooming, female genital mutilation and extremism.

The required checks are carried out on potential full-time members of staff before they take up employment. However, for a few staff members, only the basic checks have been carried out. For many members of staff, the recording of these checks is not rigorous enough and some of the checks cannot be evidenced. You have already begun to rectify this but greater urgency is needed to provide you and your governors with the assurances needed.

Inspection findings

- You are fully aware that the standard of writing in key stage 1 declined last year. You and your leaders have frequently reviewed the school's approach to writing and made changes. Some of these have been successful, others less so. Governors have ensured that adequate funding is available to increase the number of learning support assistants. This has ensured that there are sufficient staff to lead sessions to help pupils catch up. When necessary, you have made good use of external support to help pupils with speech difficulties pronounce their words more clearly.
- Across key stage 1, pupils are now making good progress in their writing. They write familiar words with consistent accuracy. The vast majority can write complete sentences by the end of Year 1 that start with capital letters and end with full stops. Some pupils in Year 1 use the exclamation mark when it is appropriate. Over the course of Year 1, pupils' letter formation improves considerably. In Year 2, pupils punctuate their work confidently and accurately. Many use conjunctives to extend their written answers. You are aware that there is more to do to increase the proportion of pupils reaching greater depth by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils' attainment in reading in key stages 1 and 2 declined in 2017. This continued a trend for key stage 2 over several years. As with pupils' reading skills in key stage 1, you are alert to this trend and have put many different processes

in train to arrest this. While these are all beginning to yield more positive outcomes, there is a lack of cohesion to the school's overall strategy for the development of reading skills across the curriculum. Consequently, progress is still not as rapid as it could be.

- All pupils who read to me did so with fluency and systematically approached unfamiliar words. They appreciate the range of texts that they can select from the school and class libraries. However, pupils comment that they do not have enough guidance about what they should be reading to challenge themselves more.
- Teachers have ensured that pupils have good technical knowledge of literary techniques and how authors use these to enhance their writing, for example through the use of metaphor or alliteration. Pupils' comprehension skills are improving. However, these lack the depth of understanding that is needed so that pupils can apply them in other situations or in their own writing. Many pupils, especially the most able, do not have the breadth of knowledge that is needed to understand fully the texts they are reading. You recognise that the school curriculum is not as well coordinated as it needs to be in order to improve this.
- During this inspection, I looked closely at the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Although there are very few pupils, and none with an education, health and care plan, they have not achieved well in recent years. They are also more likely to be excluded than any other group of pupils.
- Increasingly, pupils who have SEN are well supported in class by teachers, who plan learning and establish routines that allow pupils to make more rapid progress. Additional teaching sessions are planned when necessary and these are effective in helping pupils develop, particularly in their social skills. 'Provision plans' are maintained and reviewed each term, which allows leaders and governors to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies. As a result, pupils who have SEN are achieving more highly than in the past and the rate of exclusions has fallen dramatically.
- You, and your governors, are aware that you have limited specialist staff in school. Consequently, leaders do not consistently act swiftly enough to identify pupils' potential needs and carry out assessments. Once pupils' needs are identified, leaders engage specialists to provide strategies for teaching staff so they can better meet these needs. However, some adults lack the skills and expertise to help pupils overcome the additional barriers they face in their learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching staff have the skills and knowledge they need to:
 - identify pupils' special educational needs at an early stage
 - plan learning that fully addresses pupils' wide-ranging special educational needs

- the curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils develop a deeper understanding of the texts they are reading
- the record-keeping of pre-employment checks is fully and accurately maintained.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you joined me observing learning in classes, often accompanied by your assistant headteacher. We looked at the work of a number of pupils and many talked to me about their learning. I listened to a number of pupils read. Meetings were held with you, your assistant headteacher, your bursar and the chair of governors.

I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own analysis of strengths and weaknesses, assessment information, exclusion and safeguarding records. I considered the views of 29 parents who responded to Parent View, 12 members of staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the 105 pupils who completed the online pupil questionnaire.