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Mrs Ann Kelliher
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Dear Mrs Kelliher

Short inspection of Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Witham

Following my visit to the school on 24 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards becoming outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

During my visit, it quickly became apparent that you have created within your senior leadership team a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility. You, and this experienced and knowledgeable team, have the overwhelming support of parents, staff members and the pupils themselves. It is also clear that the desire for all pupils to fulfil their potential is at the centre of everything you, your governors and your staff do. Staff have high expectations of pupils and pupils work hard to meet these.

This strong commitment from staff and pupils has led to outcomes that are well above the national average. By the end of key stage 2, the progress that your pupils make in reading and writing places you in the top 10% of schools nationally. The progress that pupils make in mathematics has improved considerably since the last inspection and now places you in the top 20% of schools.

Classroom visits show the school to be a happy, as well as an industrious, place. Teachers understand the needs of their pupils well and plan interesting and challenging activities for them. Leaders have ensured that teachers and learning

support assistants have time together so that planning is shared. This means that learning support assistants know what to do to support pupils effectively, whether in the classroom or working with small groups.

Pupils talk with enthusiasm about their school, their teachers and their lessons. They enjoy school and so their attendance is good. The behaviour seen around school and in every classroom during the inspection was exemplary. Pupils told me of the many opportunities for outdoor learning that enliven lessons and encourage them to apply their learning in real situations. They also explained that, 'if you make a mistake, you put it into your learning' and this positive attitude towards learning from mistakes was clearly evident in classes.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is shaped through a strong religious education curriculum. This enables them to develop their understanding of Christian values but also widens their experience and understanding of the diverse and multicultural society that is Britain today. This is supplemented by regular extra-curricular events such as the 'around the world day', which pupils were looking forward to and which gives them the opportunity to explore other cultures and ways of living.

You motivate your staff by balancing the high expectations you have of them with actively encouraging and supporting their professional development. You foster innovation as long as it is based on sound research and regularly reviewed to assess impact. A good example of this is the very different approach that your early years team has adopted towards planning. The team wanted to develop independence in the children and had also identified a growing proportion of children who were entering Reception with underdeveloped speech and language. This meant that they were not ready to access the activities the adults wanted them to. The team has developed the skills to respond immediately to the curiosity of the children and build in the language development that allows the children to access learning.

This approach is continued in Year 1 and was seen clearly during a visit to the Year 1 classroom, where children's interest in the snowy weather changed the direction of the lesson and led to the teacher skilfully introducing the vocabulary needed to talk about why you can see your breath in cold weather. Pupils were learning words such as condensation at a time when they were naturally curious about it. The early years team believes that it is this approach that has led to the increase in the proportion of children who reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. This has been above the national average for the past two years.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, including making sure that all procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are robust. Staff and governors have regular safeguarding training. This contributes to the strong culture of safeguarding in the school and the increased awareness of all staff in relation to safeguarding risks. Pupils report that there is very little bullying at school and are confident that they can talk to staff about any concerns they have.

They know that staff will take action to support them. Pupils feel safe in school and all parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, agree that their children are safe and well looked after. The words of one parent summarised the feelings of many when they said that, 'Holy Family suits its name because it really does feel like you are part of a family.'

Inspection findings

- Following the previous inspection, you reviewed the way that mathematics is taught and put in place several measures that have resulted in significant improvements in both progress and attainment by the end of key stage 2. Clear leadership and effective training have enabled teachers to develop into skilled practitioners who use a consistent approach to mathematics teaching. Teachers quickly identify misconceptions or gaps in knowledge because they are constantly checking pupils' learning. Pupils' confidence in talking about mathematics has also increased because they are given useful sentence stems to help them explain their reasoning.
- Pupils' mathematics books show that although all pupils work on the same topic in a class this does not mean that they are all doing the same task. Pupils are increasingly able to decide for themselves when they have understood a basic concept enough to choose the level of challenge that will develop and embed their understanding. This was seen in a Year 2 lesson where pupils had been introduced to 'borrowing' in subtraction for the first time. One group quickly grasped what they had to do and so left the carpet where the teacher had explained the concept and moved themselves to a table to practise applying it on their own.
- A strength of the school is its inclusive approach. You and your governors have invested in an effective inclusion team that addresses some of the key barriers that inhibit pupils' learning. The team's specialisms include speech and language development and supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language. This team is highly motivated and regularly reviews the impact of its work with individual pupils to ensure that interventions are effective. This support enables all pupils to take an active part in lessons and school life. The inclusive nature of the school means that all groups of pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress and achieve well.
- A current key focus for you and your teachers is the review of the curriculum that is under way. It is clear from the vibrant and varied displays of pupils' work around school how rich this new curriculum is. This means that pupils leave for secondary school well equipped to succeed. Your philosophy of striving for excellence in all areas of the curriculum has led to recognition through the gold School Games Mark and you are keen to add to this. Apart from music, art and design technology, all foundation subjects have been reviewed to ensure that both knowledge and skills are built up over time – although this new curriculum has still to be fully embedded. Teachers are also beginning to track pupils' progress in subjects such as geography and history so that they can identify and address gaps in their understanding as they would do in mathematics, reading

and writing.

- The governing body has recently been awarded the Essex Effective Governance Award, which is testament to how far their skills and effectiveness have improved since the previous inspection. Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and know where there is still work to do. They hold teachers accountable for their areas of responsibility through focused visits and by inviting them to report to the full governing body. They are proud of how well the school performs against other schools nationally but are not complacent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes in mathematics continue to rise so that the progress and attainment of pupils are as strong as those in reading and writing
- the curriculum in all areas develops subject-specific skills and key knowledge which meet the needs of all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I visited classes to talk to pupils, observe teaching, learning and the behaviour of pupils and to examine the work in books. A range of school documents, including safeguarding records, the school's improvement plan, assessment information and the school's self-evaluation, were scrutinised. Meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, including your inclusion manager and mathematics subject leader, as well as governors and members of the school council. The responses of the 91 parents and 22 members of staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaires were also taken into account.