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Mr Christopher Birtles
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Birtles

Short inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 2016 with Paul Wilson, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and further developed the high quality of education in the school since the last inspection. St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is a purposeful place for children to learn, underpinned by a positive ethos.

The highly experienced school leadership team continue to improve their skills. They reflect on the quality of education provided and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have provided a culture where staff can train and develop their skills, particularly in leadership. Through setting ambitious targets for all adults, leaders establish high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. Consequently, standards by the end of key stage 2 continue to rise and pupils are well prepared for secondary school.

In the last inspection, you were praised for establishing a highly inclusive school with a caring and kind ethos. This remains a highly positive aspect of the school and the provision for pupils continues to improve at pace. Pupils are well cared for and happy within a safe and well organised environment. They behave well and enjoy the many learning activities provided. Pupils rarely miss a day at school and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is exceptionally low.

A test of strong leadership is how you respond to challenges. At the previous inspection, you were asked to raise the achievement of pupils in mathematics. In this you have been successful and continue to be so. In 2015, at key stage 2, the

proportion of pupils who left achieving the expected levels was above the national average. This year the proportion of pupils who achieved the required standard in mathematics is above the national average. Teachers explain mathematical concepts clearly and provide many opportunities for pupils to challenge themselves in their learning. Pupils make good progress and develop their mathematical knowledge, skills and abilities well in their time at the school.

You continue to focus on raising the standards of literacy. The teaching of reading is effective because adults provide activities that meet the needs of most pupils. Teachers provide a targeted approach to the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) that is proving to be highly effective. For the previous three years, the proportion of pupils who have achieved the expected standard in their phonics screening check in Year 1 has risen. This year, nearly all pupils achieved the required standard.

Children in the early years start their school life well. This is because the leader of early years ensures that adults provide stimulating activities that enthuse and encourage children to develop good learning habits. Consequently, the proportion of children who leave Reception achieving a good level of development has also risen for the last three years. This year, children are leaving the early years with a good level of development that is above the national average for their age again. Children are well prepared for the challenges of Year 1.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well over time and are provided with the same opportunity to excel as all pupils. This is because leadership of these pupils and the work of the adults in school are exemplary. Adults know these pupils well and make sure that the provision is exceptionally well matched to their needs. For example, some pupils who experience the 'Lego' learning sessions were able to take turns and work alongside others even though this is a challenge for them. Through strong care, guidance and support, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making at least good and often exceptional progress, personally and academically.

The quality of governance is a strong feature of the school. Led by an experienced and knowledgeable chair, the governing body provides effective challenge and support. Governors undertake a series of activities to assure themselves of the quality of education that is being provided. These activities include regular visits to school and discussions with parents and pupils to verify the accuracy of leaders' judgements about the school. As a result, governors are well informed and hold school leaders to account well for the standards of education at St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet current requirements. Recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff. Leaders and governors are rigorous in ensuring that the necessary recruitment checks have been carried out effectively. Documents and school records are meticulously kept.

Leaders and governors ensure that staff are well trained and informed about new guidance, including the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders have also provided additional training for parents and pupils so that they understand the guidance and are fully informed. Staff receive regular training and are suitably qualified and confident to implement the school's policies.

Inspectors checked the school site, policies and practices during the inspection and found that at this time, school leaders and governors carry out their statutory duties in ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils.

Inspection findings

- As headteacher, you communicate high expectations for the achievement of all pupils. Together, you and your leadership team ensure that pupils are ready for secondary school, with a good grasp of reading, writing and mathematics. Senior leaders are accurate in their evaluation of the strengths and areas for improvement. Through regular checking on the standards of teaching, learning and assessment, your leaders provide support and challenge to staff when required. As a result, you have maintained the good quality of teaching from the previous inspection.
- Leaders at all levels are effective. You provide opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership skills. As a result, staff are motivated and keen to make a difference to the quality of education the pupils receive. During the enterprise day, leaders and staff at all levels supported the Year 6 pupils so that they could raise additional funds for playground equipment. You are keen that pupils have the opportunity to leave a legacy from their time at the school. The older pupils respond maturely to the responsibility given to them. Staff and pupils enjoy and fully support this annual event.
- Leadership for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is highly effective. There are effective systems in place for communicating information to outside agencies and parents regarding the needs of individuals. The provision that is in place for these pupils meets their needs exceptionally well. For example, pupils who have additional language difficulties follow a programme that systematically addresses their needs. The coordinator for special educational needs regularly checks on the progress these pupils make.
- The achievement of pupils continues to improve. This year, the proportion of pupils who achieved the new national standard in reading, mathematics, grammar, punctuation and spelling is above the national average.
- The quality of the early years provision continues to improve. From their individual starting points, children make good progress in their time in Reception. Adults carefully plan activities that interest and enthuse the children. Children have many opportunities to practise their basic skills of writing and mathematics. During the inspection, a group of children were confidently designing a 'giant' in the construction area. They were drawing and writing instructions with ease. They ably used their understanding of the connection between sounds and letters to write as accurately as possible.
- Over the last two years, teachers have grown in confidence in using the

school's assessment system. They consistently apply your school policy. Pupils fluently describe how they know if they are doing well in English and mathematics and how adults support them to improve. As you know, some teachers do not then use this information precisely enough to plan learning that systematically moves pupils on even further.

- Teachers often provide pupils with a range of mathematical activities for them to choose their own starting point. This regular feature enables pupils to challenge themselves and make even faster progress. In one lesson, when asked about the suitability of the work, one pupil remarked, 'It is usually about right, and then we have the deeper thinking challenge after that.'
- You prioritise writing as a focus for school improvement. Pupils' use of grammar and punctuation is of a high standard across the school because adults insist on pupils producing work that is precise. Outcomes for key stage 2 pupils are a strength again this year. In most classes, pupils demonstrate pride and effort in their work. You recognise that at times, pupils in lower key stage 2 do not routinely use their knowledge of spelling as well as they could. The English leader has credible plans and systems in place to address this issue.
- Subjects other than English and mathematics, such as science, history and geography, are covered either through discrete lessons or through topics. There were often examples of opportunities where pupils applied their mathematical learning in science through drawing and interpreting graphs. However, at times, the most able pupils are not provided with enough activities that stretch and challenge their thinking or deepen their understanding further so that they can excel in other subjects.
- Support staff are trained and used well, especially in key stage 1. They provide additional support for individuals and small groups of pupils in mathematics and in developing reading skills.
- Most parents are happy with, and supportive of, the school, and the progress that their children make. In the free-text message service as part of Parent View, many parents gave positive and individual examples when expressing their views about the quality of teaching and the approachability of staff.
- All pupils who were spoken to during the inspection stated that they felt happy and safe. Children in the early years behave in a way that demonstrates that they feel safe. Through strong and positive relationships with adults, pupils are able to thrive and excel. They understand the importance of persevering in their school work. Pupils want to receive the 'golden letters' and willingly follow the school rules you have established.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- adults systematically analyse and use pupil performance information to plan learning that accelerates the progress that pupils make
- teachers ensure that more pupils achieve the required standard in writing at the end of key stage 2

- the most able pupils are sufficiently challenged so they deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders and representatives from the governing body. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority. Pupils were spoken to both formally and informally. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, school improvement plans, information about safeguarding and pupil outcomes. All teachers were observed teaching and pupils' work was scrutinised. Parents' views were evaluated through 64 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and free-text comments. Staff and pupils' views were considered through their online questionnaires.