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Dear Mrs Blanden

Short inspection of St Francis' Catholic Primary School, Maidstone

Following my visit to the school on 18 September 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 January 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 have worked effectively in collaboration with your staff and governors to build on the identified strengths and secure further development. Your determined approach and clarity of vision have helped ensure that St Francis' is a happy, harmonious and hard-working school in which staff and pupils thrive.

You have collaborated effectively with key partners, including the local authority and the diocese, to develop staff skills. In addition, you provide regular opportunities for staff to work with colleagues across the locality so that they benefit from seeing models of good practice elsewhere. This has all helped to strengthen teaching and leadership. At the same time, you have carefully evaluated provision at St Francis', developing a well-informed view of where to target improvements. This has ensured that staff training has been well focused. Your strategy has had a clear impact on key priorities, such as developing mathematics. As a result, pupils' outcomes are rising and morale is high. All staff who completed the Ofsted survey felt proud to be part of the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attendance levels are high. They told me that they work 'as a team' and value the diverse nature of their school community. One pupil explained this, saying, 'Everyone is very appreciative of each other and respectful.' Pupils know that their voice is heard and valued in school. They relish opportunities to contribute to their community, for example by being an e-safety 'internet eye' or a language ambassador. Pupils appreciate the care and consideration shown to them by

adults. One pupil told me how much she likes it when her teacher talks to her in her native Polish.

Together with other leaders, you have taken effective action to address the improvement areas from the last inspection. Your focus on developing grammar, spelling and punctuation has been effective in improving standards in writing. Provisional outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 show increased proportions of pupils attaining higher standards. This is also the case in most year groups across the school. You now aspire to replicate these high levels of attainment across the wider curriculum. You know that outcomes for the most able disadvantaged pupils are not improving at the same rate as their peers, and that this needs to be a key priority.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Recent changes have further strengthened systems of recording and sharing key information, including with other agencies. This helps ensure that any concerns are acted upon quickly.

All staff and most parents, carers and pupils who spoke to me or completed the Ofsted surveys were confident that pupils were safe at school. Parents value the well-established systems and caring ethos of the school. One parent typified this view, saying, 'My children have flourished through the guidance and support.'

Pupils understand that changes such as those to the routine at the end of the school day help increase their safety. They have a well-developed awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely together at the school's curriculum. This has been redesigned to develop skills, increase enjoyment and connect learning. Pupils are enjoying the memorable experiences this provides. Opportunities to extend English and mathematics skills across other subjects are plentiful.
- Subject leaders have supported colleagues effectively through training and planning reviews. As a result, pupils are developing the subject-specific skills they need. However, these skills are not always fully developed to extend pupils' understanding as well as they could. For example, scientific conclusions do not probe and extend pupils' thinking sufficiently. Leaders are now rightly focused on deepening knowledge and understanding across the curriculum, particularly for the most able pupils.
- You are rightly proud of the work to raise outcomes in mathematics. In the provisional outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2018, the proportions of pupils attaining at both the expected and the greater-depth standards have increased. This improvement is evident across the key stage.
- Along with the subject leader, you have secured effective training for teachers in mathematics. As a result, staff and pupils exude mathematical confidence. Teachers

use incisive questioning to extend pupils' thinking. Pupils demonstrate secure mathematical language and reasoning. The 'fast learning' – initially of times tables and now of other mathematical facts – helps pupils recall facts quickly to apply in their learning. Pupils enjoy mathematics. A pupil described how he 'couldn't get enough of it', particularly fractions!

- We also agreed to look at the teaching of phonics. In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the required standard in the phonics screening check dipped below the national figure. You responded quickly to the dip by reviewing the teaching of phonics. There are now well-developed opportunities for pupils to use and apply their phonics skills. Due to your increased expectations, outcomes rose in 2018, returning to the similarly high standards seen in previous years. During the inspection, staff and pupils were seen using phonics skills and terminology confidently. This included the very youngest pupils who had only just started school.
- We also looked closely at the provision for disadvantaged pupils across the school. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are variable. Few disadvantaged pupils are attaining the greater-depth standards. Progress from starting points is less strong in many year groups and subjects than that of their peers, especially for the most able pupils.
- You oversee provision for disadvantaged pupils using a system of staff mentoring and regular review. Case studies show the many positive outcomes of this approach, particularly in pastoral work. Governors monitor and track the use of the additional pupil premium funding to ensure that it is used effectively. Nevertheless, a greater focus on the most able disadvantaged pupils is needed to help ensure that aspirations for these pupils remain high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- initiatives to support disadvantaged pupils, particularly the most able disadvantaged pupils, are further developed so that their outcomes rise across the curriculum
- expectations for pupils to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding across the wider curriculum are raised.

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

Deborah Gordon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met regularly both with you and the leadership team. I also met with members of the local governing body, the local authority, the diocese and with some staff. I reviewed documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.

Together with leaders, I visited classes across the school. In lessons, I observed pupils learning, looked at their books and spoke to pupils about their work. I had a meeting with pupils to gather their views of the school. I took into account the views of parents I met at the school gate, and considered 29 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including nine free-text comments. I also considered 15 responses to the Ofsted staff survey and 84 responses to the pupil survey.