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Mrs Sally Nutman
Headteacher
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery
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Dear Mrs Nutman

Short inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 9 March 2016, 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 June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Over the last two years, the school has undergone a dramatic transformation of the physical environment. Major building works, both to expand the school and to join the previously split site, have recently been completed. You managed the project extremely well and did not allow standards to drop as you tackled the numerous and continual hurdles put in front of you.

You know the pupils very well and monitor how well each one is doing on an individual basis. You are supported effectively by the senior leadership team, who share your drive to continually improve the school. Although the school remains good, it has improved since the last inspection. You and the school's governors have tackled the areas for improvement from the last inspection well. Parents are highly supportive of the school and a very large majority would recommend the school to others.

Sacred Heart is a happy school where pupils enjoy their learning. When asked whether there was anything about the school that they do not like, one pupil said, 'The end of the day!' Pupils show very good attitudes to learning. They try hard and do their best. Pupils cooperate well with each other and work successfully in pairs and groups.

The school has a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Pupils show great respect for other people and value the diversity in our society. They believe that all members of the community are equal regardless of their backgrounds, beliefs or physical characteristics. Pupils say that they have been taught that they should 'treat each other how we want to be treated' and that 'everyone is welcome' in their school.

Pupils behave very well. The 'strive for five' behaviour management system is used throughout the school and this is an approach that you find works well. Pupils agree and enjoy working toward the end-of-term reward for earning the required number of points. They show a keen interest in their work because topics are chosen well and spark their interest.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the school's governors have ensured that safeguarding is effective and statutory requirements are met. The school's single central record is fully compliant and well maintained. The school's recruitment practices are robust and you ensure that thorough checks are made to check the suitability of successful candidates before they take up their posts.

The chair of the governing body monitors the school's single central record regularly. The designated governor has professional expertise in safeguarding adults. His knowledge and experience are used to good effect to strengthen the governing body's ability to support and monitor safeguarding in the school.

The designated senior lead (DSL) for safeguarding has received appropriate training to fulfil her role effectively. You have also received the same level of training to enable you to deputise for her in her absence. As a result, safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You and the DSL have very good knowledge and understanding of current safeguarding policy, including the 'Prevent' duty. You give child protection an appropriately high priority and you take prompt and decisive action where necessary.

Inspection findings

- For reasons unrelated to the school, there has been a large turnover of staff since the last inspection. Despite difficulties in recruiting teachers, you have managed to remain fully staffed and to retain a good quality of teaching. Your expectations are appropriately high and you are not afraid to tackle weaker teaching where necessary. It is clear that the school's leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the school thoroughly and take appropriate action where necessary.
- Standards are high at Sacred Heart. Children make a good start in the early years classes and a higher than average proportion reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Similarly, the proportion who reach the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check is just

above the national average. Standards at the end of key stage 1 have been rising over the last three years and overall attainment was well above the national average in 2015.

- The high level of attainment is maintained in key stage 2. Overall attainment at the end of Year 6 has been well above the national average for two of the last three years. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics was also well above the national average in 2015. Pupils make good progress overall between the end of key stage 1 and the end of key stage 2 and progress is particularly strong in writing. Outcomes in mathematics, although they compare favourably with the national average, are not as strong as in other subjects.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are good. In 2015, all disadvantaged pupils attained at least the expected level 4. The proportion who reached the higher levels was well above the national average. However, progress for this group was below average in 2015 and remains below other pupils in school and nationally, particularly in mathematics. You are aware of this gap and have put a range of appropriate measures in place to close it.
- Although all groups of pupils make good progress overall, one ethnic group did not make good progress in mathematics in 2015. The school does not track pupils by ethnic origin because, quite rightly, you prefer to focus on the progress and needs of pupils as individuals. However, although these cohorts are very small in number, their progress is not tracked to check whether there is an issue related to the particular group or whether it is simply a coincidence that pupils who share a characteristic also share a weakness in a given subject.
- You have taken a wide range of appropriate actions to tackle the relative weakness in mathematics. Although it is too soon to see the impact of many of these, it is clear that this high focus is beginning to make a difference. You invested in four full days of mathematics training for all teaching staff using a provider that you describe as 'inspiring' and an 'excellent practitioner'. As a result of this training, your observations have shown you that staff have a better understanding of how to teach particular areas of the mathematics curriculum and, as a result, pupils now show a better understanding too.
- You were aware that the previously high focus on English had lessened the time available for mathematics; this has now been rectified. The school has adopted a new calculation policy and this has clarified how some aspects of the mathematics curriculum are taught. Pupils are being given more opportunities to use their number skills to investigate mathematical problems. This was illustrated well in a Year 5 mathematics lesson where pupils relished the challenge of creating addition sums, using squared and cubed numbers, to reach a given total (such as $17 = 3 \text{ squared} + 2 \text{ cubed}$).

- The school has adopted a new assessment system and this is becoming increasingly well established. You are able to monitor pupils' attainment closely and assessment information is readily available using the school's information management system. The assessment system is less well established for mathematics and further development is needed to be able to track the progress of pupils more easily.
- The early years environment is bright and attractive. In response to issues identified, you have increased the focus on developing children's speech and language skills by extending their vocabulary and modelling the use of correct grammar. For example, during the inspection, a member of staff was heard to encourage a child to use the proper names for dinosaurs (such as 'pterodactyl') to identify the different types they were playing with.
- The school's high focus on English has had a clear impact on raising standards. Pupils' work in Year 6 shows very mature use of language and very good progress is evident. For example, the opening lines to one pupil's poem about the First World War read: 'Jealousy across Europe spread like wildfire/A thirst of power; the royal cousins built their armies', demonstrating skills well beyond what might be expected.
- Your self-evaluation summary shows a clear analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your action plan sets clear and measurable objectives, including dates and deadlines to achieve them, and it is evident that you review the plan regularly.
- Governors know the school well and have a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development. A number of new governors have recently joined the governing body and are developing their knowledge and skills, such as their understanding of published assessment information. You provide governors with a good range of appropriate information and are open to their challenge and enquiry. Governors do not yet verify the information that you give them by, for example, engaging with the local authority adviser who visits the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching in mathematics continues to improve so that a greater proportion of pupils make rapid progress in the subject
- assessment systems are developed and refined so that progress, particularly in mathematics, can be tracked as thoroughly as attainment
- governors improve their effectiveness further by seeking external opinions to validate the information they are given by the school's senior leaders and by developing their understanding of published school assessment information.

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 Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, and a group of governors. I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils and spoke with other pupils during the day. I took into account your school's own survey of parental opinion and the 70 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I observed teaching and learning in lessons jointly with you, looked at pupils' books, and scrutinised a range of school documents.