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Mrs Frances Lysyj
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lysyj

Short inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury RC School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 July 2014.

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 ensured that the school is a warm, friendly and welcoming learning environment. You, along with the senior leadership team and staff, have ensured that the school's self-evaluation is accurate. School development planning correctly prioritises areas for improvement. Robust performance management systems are in place so that all staff are aware of their responsibilities. You have ensured that rates of attendance remain above the national average.

The school day is used to the full. Pupils enjoy the organised activities before school, which encourages them to arrive early and engage in sports. Pupils told me about the many opportunities that they have to be leaders. These included the opportunity to be a school councillor or a librarian. They know how to keep themselves safe in school and online. I observed pupils behaving well in classes, in the hall and throughout the school day. Pupils told me that behaviour was good and that name-calling and bullying rarely happen.

Parents and carers are typically positive about the school. Parents who I spoke to, and those who responded to the Ofsted surveys, felt that their children were safe and happy in school. Parents believe that their children make good progress.

Governors are supportive of the school. They are knowledgeable both about the many strengths of the school and about the areas where improvements need to be made. The governing body has clear committee structures and systems to ensure

accurate sharing of information. Governors are well aware of their statutory responsibilities. For instance, they have ensured that the pupil premium and primary physical education (PE) and sport premium funding are spent effectively to make the most impact on pupils' progress. Governors provide excellent challenge and hold to account both you and your senior learners. For example, governors recently interviewed pupils to gauge how well a growth mind-set project had affected pupils' learning.

Since the previous inspection, you have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Clear processes are now in place that enable teachers to learn from best practice in the school. Teachers that I spoke to explained the benefits of peer observations and sharing skills and expertise in specific subjects. Middle leaders are actively involved in the school development planning process. They ensure that teaching in their subject areas enables pupils to build up their skills and understanding step by step. They make regular checks on the quality of teaching and the work in pupils' books to make sure that this is happening.

Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has risen and pupils in the school do better than pupils nationally. Published pupil assessment information for key stage 1 and key stage 2 shows that the proportion of pupils achieving at greater depth or reaching the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national averages in 2017.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated lead for safeguarding, you have given it your full attention. All checks on the suitability of adults to work in school are thorough. Record-keeping and policies are robust. The work you do with other agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families is well documented. All adults have received relevant and timely safeguarding training, as well as 'Prevent' training which enables them to spot potential signs of radicalisation. You have facilitated visits from the fire service, police and the ambulance service to ensure that pupils have a broad understanding of the risks that they face and how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- Historic published pupil performance information shows that boys do not always do as well as girls in writing. You have ensured that clear processes for the teaching of writing are in place. From looking in pupils' books, I could see that all pupils, including boys, are making good progress from their starting points. In key stage 1, it was evident that handwriting, punctuation and application of grammar features were developing well. In key stage 2, the processes for editing and redrafting are fully embedded. Pupils who I spoke to across the school could explain clearly what they needed to do to improve their writing further. Older pupils spoke confidently about the types of writing that they enjoy and the types that they find challenging. Pupils in Year 6 were able to discuss their recent writing on future changes in technology. They could talk about writing completed as part of a recent science topic on microorganisms. The school's own recent

pupil performance information shows that leaders have significantly narrowed the gap between the progress that boys and girls make in writing.

- You have identified in your school development plan that girls do not do as well as boys in mathematics. From looking at pupils' books in key stage 1 and key stage 2, it was clear that teachers do not consistently apply the agreed approaches to mathematics set out in the school policy. Pupils who I spoke to were able to discuss some aspects of their learning. However, pupils were not able to give examples of how they develop their learning through reasoning and extended problem-solving tasks. Sometimes work is limited to calculations and there are too many missed opportunities to develop and deepen thinking and reasoning skills. Sometimes answers are limited with little evidence of calculation. The school's current pupil performance information shows that although progress and attainment continue to improve for boys and girls, boys continue to do better than girls in some year groups. Together, we agreed that more needs to be done to ensure that all teachers follow the agreed approach to the teaching of mathematics consistently across all year groups, giving pupils more opportunities to use and apply reasoning skills.
- Pupils benefit from a wide and enriched curriculum. Themed days and weeks happen regularly and pupils look forward to these. Pupils in key stage 2 benefit from residential experiences. All year groups go on regular trips to bring learning to life. Recent trips to Chester, a local mosque and a local temple have helped to broaden pupils' experiences. Pupils' artwork is of a high quality. Whole-school art projects bring the school community together to learn. For example, the recent whole-school textile project enabled pupils to learn and apply a range of artistic techniques. Skills in other subjects are developed from an early age. For example, we observed children in the early years using tablet technology to take photographs and then place these onto a large plan of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teachers consistently apply the agreed approaches to the teaching of mathematics, ensuring that pupils are provided with sufficient opportunities to develop their reasoning skills.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the two assistant headteachers. I held a meeting with two middle leaders. I met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone call with a representative of the local authority. Together, we visited classes in each key stage. We looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils in the classes we visited. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the records relating to safeguarding pupils, and the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I spoke with parents on the playground before school and I met with pupils throughout the day. I considered the 25 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as well as the 15 parental responses received via free-text. I held a telephone conversation with one parent and one parent of a past pupil. I considered the 14 responses to the staff survey. I undertook a review of the school's website.