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Mrs Lisa Huotari
Headteacher
Stella Maris Catholic Primary School
Parkfield Road
Folkestone
Kent
CT19 5BY

Dear Mrs Huotari

Short inspection of Stella Maris Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2017, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2013. The school became an academy within the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership 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.

Your previous role as the school's deputy headteacher enabled you to build on the school's existing strengths when you took up the post of headteacher at the beginning of this academic year. You were joined, at the same time, by a new deputy headteacher and you work well together as a strong team. With good support from the trust's school improvement adviser, you quickly and accurately identified the key areas for further development. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is a key priority for your work. You have taken decisive and successful action to bring about rapid improvement in a short space of time. As a result, pupils are beginning to make better progress in mathematics. You and your team recognise that there is more work to do to strengthen the provision further.

You are mindful of the issues identified as needing improvement from the previous inspection of your predecessor school. Pupils' achievement in writing, for example, has improved. You are aware that the school's website needs updating and plans are already underway to do this. You have recognised that subject leaders need to have more impact on improving teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes. Senior leaders provide good support for established and new middle leaders to develop their skills and increase their effectiveness. Leaders track pupils' progress carefully and ensure that any additional help is quickly provided. You acknowledge the need to monitor pupils' progress from their starting points to eliminate any emerging

differences between different groups, so that all groups achieve as well as they can. Your enthusiasm and determination to provide the best education possible for pupils reflect your ambition and aspirations for the school. These are shared by staff, governors and trust members.

You have quickly gained the confidence and support of staff, parents and pupils in your leadership. Staff are proud of their school, enjoy working in it and feel valued and respected. Morale is high. Parents are very positive about the education their children receive and share your ambition. One parent commented: 'I am excited for the future of the school under the leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher.' Another wrote: 'I have every confidence in the headteacher to keep standards of teaching high and to take the school to the next level.' Parents agree that the school has a strong family feel, has an inclusive community atmosphere and provides excellent care for their children. Many parents wrote about the school's 'great ethos and values' and the care shown by staff for the well-being and personal development of every pupil. Pupils feel that they are 'loved and cared for' by adults in the school and that 'we make good friends to last a lifetime'.

Pupils enjoy learning at Stella Maris. They are happy and relish the exciting opportunities that help them develop into polite, confident, friendly and well-rounded individuals. There are excellent, trusting and respectful relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils work hard and want to do well. Pupils enjoy the projects and visits that enrich teaching and learning. For example, pupils talked about their theatre trip to see a production of 'War Horse', as part of their study of the First World War. They said it has made reading the book in class far more meaningful, as well as 'exciting and fun'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding requirements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. There is a culture of safeguarding in the school and the safety and welfare of all pupils have a high profile. During the summer holiday, you tirelessly and efficiently dealt with events on the premises, which were beyond your control, to ensure that the environment was safe and secure for pupils to return to school.

Pupils say they feel safe and happy in school and that they are confident to talk to staff should any problems arise. All parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children feel safe at school.

Staff recognise that child protection is everyone's responsibility. They receive regular training in keeping pupils safe from a variety of risks, including those related to online safety. Staff also receive timely safeguarding updates to meet any new requirements. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's well-being. You and your inclusion leader are trained as designated safeguarding leaders and your deputy headteacher is undertaking training for this role. Good relationships are established with outside agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families get the prompt and effective support they need.

You and your team work extremely hard and do all you can to promote pupils' regular attendance. As a result, attendance has improved and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced. You are vigilant in tracking attendance for groups and individuals, and following up unexplained absences.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus on the following aspects of the school's work: pupils' achievement in mathematics in key stage 2; the impact of the use of the pupil premium funding on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils; how well the curriculum supports the achievement of all groups; the capacity of leaders and managers to bring about further improvements; and the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- You are taking robust and effective steps to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. For the past two years, the proportion of pupils that reached the expected standard in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was below that found nationally and pupils' achievement lagged behind that seen in reading and writing. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of arithmetic and their use of mathematical vocabulary were areas holding them back. Your actions are successfully improving the teaching of mathematics so that, now, pupils are beginning to make faster progress. By applying their knowledge to solve problems, pupils are deepening their understanding.
- You and the governors keep a close check on the impact of the way additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used. This includes its impact on the outcomes of the most able disadvantaged pupils. Although there remain some differences in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at key stage 1, compared to other pupils nationally, their rate of progress is improving, so there is less difference between their attainment and that of others.
- Parents and pupils are pleased and enthusiastic about the curriculum you provide. One parent wrote: 'As well as a strong focus on the core subjects, I especially appreciate the creative elements that the school has embedded into the curriculum. For example, my child has completed topics on photography and "Bake Off".' Another parent commented: 'The educational visits my child has been on have enhanced his learning experience and brought the learning to life.' Your curriculum motivates and inspires pupils and ensures that all groups learn well. You agree, however, that there is more scope to ensure that teaching and the curriculum develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding to an even greater depth, from the early years onwards.
- Your focus on the quality of teaching and learning is unwavering. All teachers have performance management targets which are linked to the school improvement plan, to ensure that they are all accountable for pupils' progress. If any weaknesses in teaching are identified, leaders provide good support and guidance, and improvement is expected. There is no complacency. You challenge yourself, other leaders, staff and pupils to do even better. You welcome the challenge and support from the trust's school improvement adviser and governors. Middle leaders are clear about the expectations of their role, and are

knowledgeable about their subjects. The senior leadership team provides strong support to develop the skills of new leaders. You acknowledge that there needs to be greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning, and on pupils' outcomes, from the work of middle leaders. Leaders' commitment to the school and the community is unshakeable, which is unsurprising as you, the deputy headteacher and the chair of the governing body all attended the school as pupils. You and your leadership team show that there is strong capacity for further improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils achieving at least the expected standard in mathematics matches or exceeds the national average
- the role of the subject leader is developed so that it has greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning and on pupils' outcomes
- more pupils develop skills, knowledge and understanding in greater depth and there is less difference in attainment between different groups of pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive of the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership, 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

Margaret Coussins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation and the aspects to focus on during the inspection. I also met with your inclusion manager, your English and mathematics leaders and the trust's senior school improvement adviser. I held a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body and met with three other governors. I considered 23 responses to Ofsted's parent survey, Parent View, including 21 free-text comments, and spoke to some parents at the start of the day. I took account of 18 responses to the staff survey. I carried out learning walks with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. I looked at pupils' work in their books, and talked to them about their learning and their views of the school. I observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime and on the playground. I sampled a range of documents, including: information about pupils' outcomes; the school improvement plan; minutes of governors' meetings; records of visits from the school improvement adviser; and documents relating to safeguarding.