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Mr Ian Kendal
Executive Headteacher
St Alban's Catholic Academy
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Dear Mr Kendal

Short inspection of St Alban's Catholic Academy

Following my visit to the school on 14 February 2019, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with other leaders, you have maintained and built upon the strengths identified at the previous inspection. Leaders have ensured that the areas for improvement recommended in the previous report have been addressed appropriately.

Leaders and governors know the school very well. This is because they carefully monitor the quality of education and skilfully analyse information to drive further improvement. They are accurate in their identification of successes and the steps they need to take to secure further improvement. Development plans focus on the right actions to bring about sustained and continuous improvement.

The school's values permeate all aspects of school life. They are prominently displayed in classrooms and across the school. Pupils I met with told me that, 'Everyone is welcoming and accepting and we are one big family.' I observed pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning to be exemplary. Pupils clearly enjoy their learning and are very happy at school. One commented that: 'Our class teacher asked us what we wanted to do in English. They make things interesting and we have lots to discuss.'

The majority of parents speak highly of the school. One commented, 'It's an amazing school.' Another wrote: 'Both of my girls skip into school in the morning. Under the excellent stewardship of Mr Kendal the school has improved.' Parents are happy that their children are kept safe.

You have a clear rationale for your curriculum design, which is in the second year of implementation. Interesting topics and effective delivery ensure that it is broad, meaningful and enriching. We scrutinised pupils' writing across the curriculum in all year groups. It is evident that the topics that pupils are studying are not only developing their knowledge and skills but also providing a good vehicle for writing. We saw lots of good-quality writing and evidence of good progress in writing. Topics are linked to the texts that pupils are reading. For example, Year 6 have been learning about natural disasters, within which there has been a strong art focus, but this topic has also been cleverly linked to writing. In Year 2, pupils had been enthused by their current topic on habitats, linked to the book 'Tiddler'.

Across the school, there is a strong learning culture. All staff, including those in leadership roles, benefit from regular and relevant training opportunities. In addition, you have worked to strengthen leadership by involving more teachers in leading important areas. Leadership is well structured and organised with clear roles and responsibilities. Staff are united in their drive to continue to raise standards. All who responded to Ofsted's staff survey said that they enjoy working at the school and are proud to do so. They agree that the school is well led and managed and value the opportunities for professional development that are provided for them.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, governors and trustees have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of vigilance across the school. You ensure that staff are well trained and that their knowledge is regularly and appropriately updated.

All procedures to ensure the safe recruitment of staff are in place and are checked regularly by leaders and governors. Office staff are meticulous in their maintenance of the single central register.

Pupils spoke confidently about how they learn to keep themselves safe, including when working online. They recalled professional visitors who had come in to school to speak about various aspects of keeping safe, including internet safety, fire hazards and road safety. Pupils say that there is no bullying and that any minor 'falling-out' is dealt with quickly and effectively by staff.

Inspection findings

- In addition to safeguarding, I focused on several key lines of enquiry during the inspection.
- The first of these was to do with differences between the attainment of boys and girls. This was because published information for 2018 showed a gap between their attainment in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2, which was wider than that seen nationally. We discussed this and considered information from previous years. This showed no similar gaps and suggested that the differences identified were limited to the 2018 year group. We also looked at

your internal assessment information which showed that no such gaps exist currently.

- Additionally, together with your head of school, I looked at writing in all year groups and in particular Year 2 and Year 6. We saw that the interesting curriculum is inspiring boys and girls alike to produce good-quality writing and enabling them to make good progress. Part of your curriculum innovation has been to ensure that topics appeal equally to boys and girls.
- My next focus was to determine what the school is doing to ensure that more pupils exceed age-related expectations at the end of and key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. These have not been consistently in line with or above those seen nationally over the last two years. Your school development plan includes increasing the proportion of pupils who reach the higher standard. In mathematics, increasing the opportunities teachers provide for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills has been a focus. There has been regular training for staff to increase their subject knowledge and skills. The impact of this is evident in pupils' books.
- The high-quality writing seen in pupils' responses to the interesting curriculum verifies that more are producing work that exceeds age-related expectations.
- A new approach to teaching reading, with a focus on developing pupils' skills of inference and deduction, is also having a positive impact, although not enough time has passed for new initiatives to have made a discernible difference in outcomes.
- My final line of enquiry was to determine how well the school had addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. These centred around sharing good practice across the school and setting work to deepen the understanding of the most able pupils. The school's approach to developing leadership and improving its capacity is enabling good practice to be shared across both schools in the trust. Using a model of coaching, teachers from both schools work together to plan and observe each other teaching and offer feedback, sharing strengths and areas for development.
- The work being undertaken to increase the proportion of pupils who exceed age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics is evidence of your response to this area for improvement. In lessons seen, there was a focus on effective challenge, through teachers' questioning and pitch of work. Teachers were heard to ask pupils to check their writing to see if they had included those structures in their writing which would provide evidence that they were working at greater depth or the higher level. Overall, the areas for improvement have been appropriately addressed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the actions identified in the school development plan are carefully implemented to ensure that improvements to date are built upon and have full impact in

ensuring that more pupils exceed the expected standards at the end of Year 6.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Brentwood, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Beale
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you and your head of school about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's self-evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' progress and attainment. Additionally, I met with subject leaders and the chair of the governing body for the trust.

I visited all classrooms, accompanied by either the executive headteacher or head of school, to observe teaching, learning and assessment. Together, we looked at the work in pupils' books in a range of subjects.

I met with a group of pupils to talk about their experiences at school. I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice, including systems for safe recruitment of staff.

I took account of 20 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I also gathered the views of parents through 43 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 40 responses using the free-text service. Additionally, I spoke with parents when they were collecting their children from school.