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Mr Robert Page
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Page

Short inspection of St Anthony's School

Following my visit to the school on 2 July 2019 with Catherine Davies, Ofsted inspector, 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 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, your leaders and staff are determined that all your pupils have the right opportunities to be successful. Collectively you are committed to ensuring that pupils' emotional well-being is at the heart of the work of the school. You know that with the right support the pupils can achieve the best possible outcomes, both at school and in their future lives.

Relationships between pupils, their peers and staff are strong; this creates a safe environment where pupils enjoy learning. Parents and carers who spoke to the inspectors, at the start of the day, on the telephone or who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were very positive about the school. One parent said: 'St Anthony's worked wonders with our son. His progress has been amazing and so is the ethos of the school and the care he gets from the staff.'

Since the last inspection, the leadership structure has been strengthened with the addition of more assistant headteachers and the appointment of subject leaders. Although the leadership of English and mathematics is more firmly established, you recognise that other middle leaders have yet to develop their expertise sufficiently to drive improvements in teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.

Many of the pupils join the school with reading levels way below their peers. Leaders have therefore made reading a real focus within the school. The school employs a 'reading doctor' who works with all pupils with a reading age of less than eight. This intervention has been extremely positive and over the last nine months,

on average, these pupils' reading ages have improved by nearly two years. One pupil proudly told the inspector that a year ago he was on reading 'stage one' and he is now on 'stage five'. On our joint learning walk with leaders, pupils were seen maintaining their concentration due to well-planned work that meets their individual needs effectively. In some areas, however, expectations of what individuals can achieve were too low.

Governors come from a variety of different backgrounds and collectively have the skills to challenge and support leaders with their work. Since September the governors have implemented a rigorous monitoring system that thoroughly examines every aspect of the school's work. Governors are confident that the subject leaders they have already monitored, for example English, are driving improvements.

At the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the school's many strengths. They also recommended that pupils' progress in mathematics in Years 7 to 11 be improved. Leaders have tackled this in a variety of ways, including by appointing a leader in mathematics. This middle leader monitors her subject and trains staff so they can be more effective in the teaching of mathematics in the school. The impact of all the actions has meant that there is now no difference in the progress of pupils in mathematics compared to English. Leaders, however, realise that there is a need to challenge the most able pupils to make stronger progress in mathematics.

The last inspection report also suggested that leaders develop a clear plan across the school to identify and support pupils' underlying emotional and/or mental health issues. This is now a real area of strength in the school. Staff take the time to get to know and understand the pupils' emotional needs very well. There is an extensive array of interventions used to support pupils' well-being. Additionally, a group of pupils have been identified to be part of the 'Headstart Kent' programme. This aims to help pupils develop their own resilience in order to cope better when they are faced with difficult circumstances in their lives. 'Headstart' was introduced in the school in September and it is already having encouraging results.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' well-being is a priority for staff in the school. Systems and processes around safeguarding are robust, records are meticulous and the tracking of actions following concerns is exceptional. Leaders engage with a wide range of stakeholders and escalate concerns if they feel that the response to referrals is not adequate. Staff provide close care and support to meet pupils' identified needs. Pupils overcome wider barriers to learning because of quick and timely interventions. The single central record clearly details the employment and background checks that leaders carry out on staff and other adults before they work in school. Leaders and governors, however, agreed that the systems, although strong, would benefit from fine tuning.

Parents and staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire all agreed that pupils feel happy and safe at school. School is often the first point of disclosure

when pupils have concerns. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe at school and trust staff to support them when they have a problem. Pupils were able to identify the impact of learning, which enables them to keep safe in a range of situations, including online, and which helps them avoid being groomed or at risk from drugs. Pupils also demonstrated highly mature attitudes towards inclusion and diversity. They are welcoming of difference, saying, for example, that they have no problem with pupils who may be transgender or bisexual. One pupil told the inspector, 'It is their choice to decide what they want to do.'

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we examined how leaders have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. We looked at the progress of pupils, with a focus on secondary mathematics, but also including all year groups and other subjects. We investigated how leaders have developed the curriculum to support pupils' academic progress and personal development, preparing pupils for their next steps in education or employment. We considered how leaders have supported pupils to improve their behaviour and attendance. We also evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- The information the school receives from pupils' predecessor schools is often out of date. This is particularly the case if pupils have spent long periods of time out of education. Consequently, on arrival at the school, leaders assess pupils to establish a secure baseline from which progress can be measured. Leaders use this information to set aspirational targets for the pupils. If pupils make accelerated progress, the targets are raised. Conversely if pupils are not achieving as well as would be expected, then interventions and support are put in place. As a result, the majority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make strong progress.
- Pupils told inspectors that they can easily identify how much progress they have made since joining the school. They recognised that their self-esteem has improved, and that they are more confident in their learning. However, pupils also said that sometimes work in mathematics can be 'boring', as it is too easy. Leaders know that many of the pupils had negative experiences of education in the past. Pupils therefore need advice and encouragement to be prepared to make mistakes and to face new challenges in mathematics.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is designed to develop pupils' academic skills, help address the pupils' special needs, and develop their resilience. In key stages 2 and 3, the curriculum intent is to develop the fundamental skills of literacy and communication, including numeracy and computing skills, through a themed approach. In key stage 4, pupils study a variety of subjects, including English and mathematics as well as optional courses leading to qualifications. Pupils in key stage 4 follow one of two pathways, depending on their academic ability and special educational needs.
- The culture of the school ensures that every pupil is well provided for and that resources are targeted directly to improve their well-being and attendance. This is evident in the rich and well-planned curriculum that engages pupils and builds positive behaviours and attitudes to learning. Each pupil's needs are well known,

and a curriculum is built around the pupils' interests and future employment goals. Case studies show that leaders are extremely vigilant and maximise all resources to engage everyone, especially targeting pupils who refuse to come to school. The curriculum is well planned and meets pupils' needs extremely well. It strongly supports their overall development and prepares them well for their next steps. The school's careers education, information, advice and guidance, and college support, are highly effective. As a result, all pupils successfully transitioned to college or training when they left the school.

- The school's behaviour-management systems are robust and focus on rewards as well as consequences. Highly reflective and proactive practice around exclusions and tailored interventions ensures improvement in individual pupils' behaviour over time. Individual case studies of pupils who have repeat exclusions demonstrate the extensive and creative practice leaders have implemented to engage pupils. This has resulted in pupils improving their behaviour, developing conflict-resolution skills, and improving their attitudes to education.
- Leaders ensure that attendance systems are effective in providing timely support. Many of the pupils enter the school with poor previous attendance or having refused to attend school previously. Leaders build strong relationships with parents. As a result, pupils' attendance, and therefore their engagement with learning, has improved. Leaders rightly recognise the importance of reducing absence and this remains a focus for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders develop their expertise, thereby enabling them to drive improvements in teaching and learning in the areas for which they are responsible
- in mathematics there is timely, appropriate challenge so that the most able pupils make stronger progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Conway
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, my colleague and I met with you, the school's leadership team, the chair of the governing body, the safeguarding governor and the local authority's adviser. We visited classes in all key stages to observe pupils learning, talk with pupils about their progress and look at their books.

We spoke to a group of pupils and parents. We spoke to one parent on the telephone. We looked at four responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, including two free-text comments. We also considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys from 43 members of staff and 23 pupils. We looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, the curriculum and assessment. We examined the school's analysis of pupils' progress and attainment, leaders' self-evaluation and their plans for improvement.