

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



9 November 2017

Mrs Maureen Grabski
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Greenfield Road
Gillingham
Kent
ME7 1YH

Dear Mrs Grabski

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 the school was judged to be good in February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in January 2017, you have worked with unwavering determination to ensure that pupils continue to receive a good education at St Mary's. This is despite considerable disruption to staffing, which has been challenging, but nevertheless you have overcome this to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning remains good.

Your ambition, aspirations and determination to maintain and further improve the performance of the school are shared by staff, pupils and governors. You have secured their confidence in your leadership. Staff morale is high. You are dedicated to supporting teachers in developing their leadership skills. You have increased the leadership capacity, notably by creating a strong team of phase leaders. This team is becoming increasingly accountable for the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils in their year groups.

You have created a culture of improvement through strong, supportive and collaborative teamwork across the school. You have a strong commitment to pursuing excellence through the latest research and developments in education, which you actively seek out. You have created an exciting learning community, not just for pupils but for all staff. Leaders, including governors, are passionate about extending their knowledge, skills and expertise to provide the best for pupils.

Parents are very positive about all that the school offers their children. You have

secured their confidence in your leadership. One parent wrote: 'The headteacher listens to parents and the pupils and works with them very well. I am very proud of the work that Mrs Grabski and the teachers are doing.' All of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, agreed that their children are happy at school and well looked after.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, are happy, work hard and want to do well. They develop as well-rounded, polite, friendly individuals who are able to talk confidently about their learning. They learn in a happy, calm and safe environment. They are nurtured and thrive at the school. A parent wrote: 'My daughter is now in Year 6 and has been given opportunities to become more independent and given leadership skills.' Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and are proud of their school. All the pupils who responded to the survey agreed that the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally. One parent wrote: 'The school has a diverse cultural background and I have always felt that pupils appreciate and celebrate each other's differences and learn from each other.'

You and the governors successfully tackled the issues highlighted in the previous inspection. Pupils are now adept at discussing their own learning and the progress they are making. Leaders and governors undertake a range of monitoring that effectively and accurately identifies the current priorities. These priorities inform the school's development plan which provides a clear steer for further improvement. Pupils' achievement in writing is a focus for leaders' work as well as the achievement of some groups, especially pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and higher-attaining pupils.

The proportion of pupils that reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 continued to be above that found nationally in 2017. Pupils' progress in writing, particularly for boys, in 2017, however, was not as strong as it was for reading and mathematics. The proportion reaching the higher level in 2017 was below that found nationally. The actions you are taking are having a positive impact. In particular, boys are increasingly motivated and inspired to write and are making better progress. At the end of key stage 1 in 2017, too few pupils achieved a greater depth in learning in reading, writing or mathematics. You attribute this to the disruption in staffing in Year 2 at the end of last year. You are making sure that these pupils, now in Year 3, are making stronger progress to catch up in their learning. You agree, however, that there is scope for more pupils across the school, including in the early years, to develop skills, knowledge and understanding at a greater depth, and particularly in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The governing body and leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff know the pupils well and know that they are all responsible for pupils' well-being and safety. Staff are vigilant in raising any concerns and know the procedures to follow. The headteacher and

deputy headteacher are trained as designated safeguarding leads. All staff receive appropriate training with regular updates so that they are fully aware of any new requirements. The ethos of the school is one of care and compassion. The school values, which are upheld by staff and pupils, mean that there is a culture of trust and respect for others. Pupils say they feel safe and well looked after and almost all parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, agree that their children feel safe in school. One parent wrote: 'My daughter has always been happy at St Mary's and the safe environment they provide is the perfect place for her to grow and learn.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to focus on: pupils' progress in writing, particularly that of boys; how well the curriculum supports the learning of all groups; how well pupils are challenged to do the best they can; how well children in the early years catch up from their starting points; and the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and designed to meet the needs as well as the interests of all groups of pupils. Exciting topics are carefully selected to motivate and appeal to all. Work is linked across curriculum subjects to ensure that learning is meaningful and relevant. The arts, music and sport have a high profile in the school and pupils show impressive skills in a range of activities. Assessments ensure that teachers know how well all groups of pupils are achieving in all subjects.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to write in different styles across the curriculum. This is helping pupils to use their writing skills in a range of contexts and make better progress. Pupils in Year 3, for example, devised questions based on their class novel 'The snow merchant'. The quality of pupils' writing was good and demonstrated the influence of quality texts on their writing. Pupils, and boys in particular, respond well to your approach, which sets great store by giving them opportunities to talk about their writing before getting their ideas down on paper. Leaders are engaged in research projects to develop and share good practice throughout the school to support boys' achievement.
- You are keenly aware that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made slower progress from their starting points than others in 2017. Effective actions are in place to carefully track the progress of this group to ensure that they receive high-quality teaching and support to improve their progress. Your inclusion leader ensures that pupils' needs are accurately identified, and specialist provision is given where appropriate, including from outside agencies when needed.
- Teachers know their pupils well and plan so that pupils have 'choice and challenge' in their learning. Your approach is to ensure that pupils are confident to take risks and challenge themselves and that teachers do not impose limits on learning based on pupils' ability. The impact of this approach is more evident in some classes than others as it is not yet fully embedded across the school. You acknowledge that there is scope for more pupils to be achieving greater depth in

their knowledge, skills and understanding.

- You have ensured that children in the early years make rapid progress from their starting points, which are often well below the expectations for their ages when they start in the Nursery or the Reception classes. They are well prepared to continue their learning in Year 1. The proportion of children who reached a good level of development in 2017 improved and was considerably above that found nationally. Leaders have correctly identified that the outdoor learning spaces could be utilised more effectively to further enrich and stimulate children's learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils achieve learning at a greater depth, especially in writing
- teachers build on the strengths in provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so they make better progress from their starting points
- the outdoor areas in the early years are used more effectively to further enrich and stimulate children's learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness, your checks on the quality of teaching and the aspects to focus on during the inspection. I also met with your deputy headteacher, the inclusion leader and your four phase leaders. I held a telephone conversation with the local authority's school improvement adviser. I met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I considered 27 responses to Ofsted's parent survey, Parent View, including 19 free-text comments, and spoke to some parents at the start of the day. I took account of 25 responses to the staff survey and 33 responses to the pupil survey. You accompanied me on my visits to classes. During these visits, I spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. We discussed our findings from these visits. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records, including: an external evaluation of the school; information about pupils'

achievement; the school improvement plan; and documents relating to safeguarding.