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Mrs Maria Cowler
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cowler

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 December 2012.

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 led improvements successfully at St Mary's. You have created a dedicated team who work well together to turn your vision for the school into reality. Leaders' considerable strengths have enabled teaching to improve further. Pupils develop successful learning habits. The themes of 'reflection, collaboration, resilience, creativity, independence and responsibility' are threaded carefully throughout lessons. These positive learning behaviours help pupils learn well and make good progress in a range of subjects.

Parents hold the school in high regard. They value how effectively you and staff members work to ensure that pupils feel safe and cared for well. They appreciate the additional experiences staff members provide, including sporting opportunities, arts activities and school productions.

You have ensured that the school has a friendly and caring atmosphere. Pupils enjoy attending school and have a positive approach to their learning. They behave well and respect adults and classmates alike. They know how to treat each other equally, respecting one another's differences, and enjoy the wide group of friends they develop at the school. They relish the opportunities to take on greater responsibilities such as play leaders, Year 6 ambassadors and morning gate monitors.

When the school was last inspected, inspectors noted that pupils achieved well from their starting points, had good behaviour, and that teaching was mostly good. You have built upon these strengths and tackled the areas identified for improvement successfully. These included improving all teaching to be consistently good or outstanding, and improving the outside learning environment for the Reception class.

You have ensured that teaching has improved. Leaders make regular checks on how well pupils learn and ensure that teachers adapt teaching to meet the needs of all pupils. The most able pupils, and those who need to catch up, are supported by teaching that challenges them appropriately.

The early years outdoor learning area is bright and cheerful. Despite the rain on the day of inspection, children were outside in their wellington boots learning enthusiastically across a variety of activities. The environment is appealing and activities carefully planned to ensure that pupils are keen to learn outdoors, whatever the weather.

Leadership is consistently strong across St Mary's. For example, governors play an effective role in supporting the school and check leaders' work with rigour. That said, they are rightly reviewing their structure and working practices to be even more effective. They believe that this will enable them to have a deeper, more accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. This work is currently in progress and the benefits as yet not fully realised.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all arrangements to keep pupils safe are robust and fit for purpose. Records of any concerns are accurate and of high quality. All appropriate checks are made when recruiting staff, volunteers and contractors.

Leaders hold recently updated and relevant qualifications. They take safeguarding seriously and ensure that all staff receive regular training on a range of topics, such as the school's duty to prevent radicalisation. This ensures that all staff members have the information they need to know how to keep pupils safe.

Pupils know how to keep themselves from harm. They pay attention in lessons about e-safety and are able to talk with confidence about how to be safe online. They appreciate the steps leaders have taken to ensure that the school site is secure. Pupils report that the new gates and fences make them feel protected and well looked after at school.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I focused on how effectively pupils develop their writing skills. I also looked closely at the school's curriculum to see whether it provides rich learning opportunities across a range of subjects, and how well pupils learn about the fundamental British values of democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance.

- You have provided a clear vision and plan for improving pupils' writing. Leaders have ensured that pupils are already writing more effectively as a result. That said, this work is just beginning and pupils' achievement in writing does not yet match that in reading and mathematics.
- Subject leaders have helpful expertise which they use well to improve pupils' learning. For example, they have worked together well to develop a successful whole-school approach to developing pupils' writing. You have rightly identified that these leaders need to develop the impact of their leadership even more strongly in the future.
- Children's emerging writing skills are developed effectively in the early years. Children learn to form letters carefully and with growing accuracy. Where necessary, staff members guide children successfully to hold their pen or pencil appropriately.
- Pupils are encouraged to read widely. Teachers ensure that pupils read texts from a range of authors, and often use these books to plan effective writing opportunities. This supports pupils' growing understanding of how to write well. Pupils write more effectively because they have a growing appreciation of good literature.
- Leaders' plans to develop pupils' writing across a range of subjects are working well. For example, pupils camped out overnight at school to support their learning about the explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton. This exciting activity fired their imagination and enabled them to write highly imaginative diary extracts.
- During my visit, I saw many valuable examples of pupils developing wider skills across the curriculum. This ranged from undertaking challenging experiments in science to creating artwork inspired by Kandinsky and Salvador Dali. On display, I also saw pupils' creative work inspired by learning Spanish.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of tolerance and respect. They talked to me confidently about different world religions and how valuing each other's different views and beliefs was very important.
- Leaders take every opportunity to enrich pupils' understanding of British values. Pupils develop behaviours of fairness, equality and respect which ensure that they can grow up as model citizens. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strategy to improve pupils' writing continues to develop so that pupils achieve as well as they do in reading and mathematics
- subject leaders develop their expertise so that their impact on pupils' learning develops further
- governors sharpen their challenge and support for leaders by making the way they work increasingly systematic.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dom Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I observed learning in most classes, spoke to pupils and looked at work in their exercise books. Some observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher. Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders and two members of the governing body. I spoke with representatives from the local authority and the diocese on the telephone. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and took into account 44 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 15 written comments. I also analysed 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and two responses to the pupil survey. A range of documents were reviewed, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation, information about pupils' achievement, governing body reports, local authority reports and records concerning pupils' attendance, behaviour and safety.