

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Peter Edgington
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Glamis Street
Bognor Regis
West Sussex
PO21 1DJ

Dear Mr Edgington

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 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 June 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 in September 2015, you have successfully guided your school during a period of rapid change, including numerous changes in staffing. You have sustained the focus on improving teaching throughout this unsettled phase and have achieved considerable success.

At the time of the previous inspection, the school was asked to improve the use of assessment to ensure that teaching supports learning for all groups of pupils, including the most able. You and your team have established reliable procedures for assessing pupils' learning and tracking their progress rigorously. As a result, teachers are clearer about how well pupils are learning. Teachers have better expectations of all pupils and are more knowledgeable about how to teach subjects such as English and mathematics to a high standard. Pupils say their teachers explain subjects clearly in lessons. However, recent improvements in teaching are not yet fully established in all classes. Some teaching does not deepen and extend learning sufficiently for the most able pupils. You and your team are fully aware that some variations in teaching remain and have clear plans in place to guide future improvements.

Your school's strong moral and religious values make an important contribution to the development of pupils' personal, spiritual and academic achievement. You have wisely taken care, since your appointment, to maintain these strengths while

establishing higher expectations of pupils' achievement successfully. Pupils from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds get on very well together and work hard. Pupils of all ages are impeccably polite. They behave well in lessons, during playtimes and when moving around the school. Parents are confident that their children are learning well and are very happy with the school's work.

Your governors and senior leaders contribute well to the school's work. Governors' understanding of their roles has improved since the previous inspection so that they have a more accurate view of the school's work. You, your deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher work together effectively as a team. However, work to clarify and strengthen subject leaders' roles is at an early stage of development. They do not yet have a sufficiently accurate view of pupils' learning across the school to secure the necessary improvements in their subjects of responsibility.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You deliver regular training well to make sure your staff and governors are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures. You are not complacent about the need to ensure that pupils are safe, and use routine checks to make ongoing improvements to safeguarding arrangements. You work well with agencies, such as the local police force, to reinforce messages about issues such as safe parking in the school's locality. High-quality, detailed records contribute well to pupils' safety and well-being. Your administrative officer makes sure that suitability checks for adults are completed efficiently so that pupils are secure.

Pupils say that teachers expect and encourage them to behave sensibly and considerately. They feel that adults in school listen to their views and follow up any concerns quickly. Parents say that leaders and teachers keep them informed about any safety issues and are confident that the school's staff will keep their children safe.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I focused particularly on: whether teaching in the early years equips children well enough with writing and mathematics skills; the extent to which teaching in key stage 1 prepares all groups of pupils for the next stage of their learning; and whether all groups of pupils make sufficiently rapid progress in writing and mathematics in key stage 2. I also looked at whether all groups of pupils attend regularly.
- Teaching in the early years builds well on children's differing starting points when they join the school. For example, leaders make sure children with weaker speaking and listening skills have extra help so that they learn how to communicate clearly. Leaders have put effective support in place for children who speak English as an additional language, including appointing a dual language teaching assistant, so that children quickly settle and make good progress. Teachers review regularly how well children are learning, and adapt teaching accordingly. For instance, they have made recent changes to mathematics

teaching to ensure all children participate equally in number and counting activities. Adults use practical equipment, such as coins, counters and number cards, effectively to strengthen children's understanding of mathematics. Children in the early years join in confidently with a range of interesting activities, both in the classroom and in the outdoor area. For example, during the inspection children thoroughly enjoyed practising number and counting skills while playing a game of skittles.

- Good-quality phonics teaching gives children the confidence and skills to read and write successfully. During the inspection, children used their phonics knowledge happily to write about the story of 'The enormous turnip'. The numerous examples of children's writing displayed throughout the early years classrooms indicate the school's success in making sure children are equipped with the attitudes and skills needed for the next stage of their education in Year 1.
- In the past, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching have caused fluctuations in pupils' learning between classes and year groups across both key stages. Leaders have improved and strengthened teaching substantially during the past year so that all groups of pupils, particularly boys, learn increasingly well. Leaders are now addressing the remaining variations in the quality of teaching to secure further improvements in pupils' learning. They are, rightly, focusing on making sure that teaching deepens and extends learning for the most able pupils.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding successfully to ensure that the very small number of disadvantaged pupils achieve well in all year groups. Governors regularly check and discuss the difference that additional help is making to eligible pupils' achievement. Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils in the school and others nationally.
- Leaders have made substantial improvements to the teaching of phonics since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils achieving expected standards in the Year 1 phonics check has improved markedly over the past three years. In 2016, all groups of pupils achieved well in the phonics check. The proportion achieving expected standards matched national averages in 2016, with boys doing particularly well. Secure phonics skills support pupils' progress effectively in reading and writing.
- Leaders have made changes to English and mathematics teaching since the previous inspection to improve pupils' learning. A more consistent approach to teaching these subjects ensures that learning builds more securely as pupils move up through the year groups. Leaders have used training effectively to improve teachers' subject knowledge and confidence in teaching English and mathematics. The work in pupils' books illustrates considerable improvements in the quality of pupils' learning as a result. Pupils in both key stages are increasingly well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- School leaders make sure parents are aware of the importance of regular attendance. They work closely with parents and agencies and take all steps possible to ensure that pupils attend regularly. Leaders have secured impressive improvements in individual pupils' attendance as a result.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements in the quality of teaching are securely established in all classes
- teaching deepens the most able pupils' learning sufficiently
- subject leaders play a more significant role in the school's development.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Sackett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I visited all classes with either you or your deputy headteacher. I talked with pupils and looked at their work during our visits to classrooms. I also looked separately at a sample of pupils' books with your English and mathematics leaders. I talked with pupils as they moved between lessons and in the dining hall during lunchtime.

I met with you, your assistant headteacher and your deputy headteacher during the inspection. I also met six governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and a local authority representative. I took account of 78 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day. I also considered 17 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 74 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

I reviewed the school's website and considered a range of documents, including your summary of the school's effectiveness, the school's improvement plan and local authority reports. I also looked at documents relating to safeguarding and attendance.