

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



8 February 2016

Miss Véronique Vanderschelden
Headteacher
St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School
Hastings Road
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex
TN40 2ND

Dear Miss Vanderschelden

Short inspection of St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 2016, 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 September 2010.

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 substantive headteacher you have moved the school forward. Prior to this, the long period of time you undertook in the role as acting headteacher allowed the school to stabilise after a difficult period. There have been clear improvements since the last inspection. Staff, the local authority and the overwhelming majority of parents agree that the school is improving.

There is a clear sense of purpose in the school. Relationships are strong and there is a high degree of mutual respect shown between staff at all levels. Everyone I met during my visit showed pride in belonging to the school community. This included the parents and pupils, who were very vocal in their support for the school and their respect for the staff within it.

The school has a very welcoming feel to visitors. The environment is inviting, with high-quality art work and well-presented displays and examples of pupils' work on show in classrooms and communal areas. Pupils are clearly proud of their work and there were a number of times during my visit when I witnessed them discussing with 'critical acclaim' displays of models or examples of their written work as they moved around the school.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and is built around learning journeys, where topics and themes are developed. Pupils told me they enjoy learning and that

coming to school is 'mostly' exciting. This excitement starts in the Reception class, where children now get a very good start to their primary education. The early-morning activity for young scientists I witnessed was particularly pleasing to see, with mini white lab coats ready and a range of investigations to undertake preparing the scientists of the future, and all before nine o'clock.

The achievement of pupils is monitored closely. Your work using the new system for tracking their progress and intervening when required is developing well. You have created capacity in the leadership team by allowing the assistant headteacher to become non-class-based this year. This is allowing a more focused approach to all aspects of school leadership. Staff are benefiting from the higher levels of guidance and support this initiative provides.

The behaviour and conduct of pupils are excellent. They display a very mature attitude to learning and show great respect for staff and the school as a whole. They were confident and keen to tell me about their work. When asked, they found it very difficult to identify aspects of the school that could be improved. Members of the school council take their duties very seriously. They made it very clear to me that they were the representatives for their classmates and had probing questions of their own to ask me toward the end of our formal meeting.

At the time of the last inspection inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including the outstanding care and support for pupils and good self-evaluation by school leaders. They also identified a need to raise the quality of teaching and learning, especially in Key Stage 1, and to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Leaders have addressed these matters effectively so that:

- the quality of teaching and learning has improved, with good outcomes for different groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged, disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and the more able
- provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved and now ensures that more children than the national average make good progress and are well prepared for their move into Year 1.

Since becoming headteacher you have continued the important process of self-evaluation in order to identify the key priorities to improve the school. It is clear to me that you are aware of the many strengths of the school and, more importantly, you are well aware of those areas that need further development. The number of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) screening checks fell last year and work has already begun to address this. You are also working with staff to improve the quality of feedback to pupils, including developing questioning skills, in order for pupils to make very rapid and secure progress.

Actions taken by the local authority have had good impact, ensuring that you have been advised and supported well since your appointment. This has included reviews

of leadership and safeguarding and brokering and funding a partnership with the headteacher of a local outstanding school who is a national leader of education.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety of pupils is of very high importance at this school. Staff at all levels and the governing body as a whole understand their different roles and responsibilities well. A wide range of training has taken place to ensure that children are kept safe. Policies and routines are appropriate. The checks undertaken on the suitability of staff and other adults in the school to work with children and the procedures for recruiting and the induction of staff are robust.

Pupils told me that they feel very safe within school. One child told me about how she felt safe and happy as soon as she came through the school gates, invariably welcomed by the headteacher. Parents also told me that they think their children are safe and cared for well. The day-to-day welfare of pupils also has a high priority. The school site is well maintained and staff ensure that it remains that way.

Inspection findings

- You have worked very hard to support the school during a difficult period of transition and you are leading with confidence and determination in order to make this an outstanding school. Staff, including your very effective assistant headteacher, support you and each other well. Because of this the school is moving forward and improving rapidly.
- Governors are conscientious and serve the school well. They are mindful of the balance required to offer both challenge and support to school leaders in order to bring about the improvements required. Recent changes in the way committees are structured in order for governors to carry out their duties in a more efficient way have been thought through well, allowing governors to concentrate on the things that matter most.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a very good start because the quality of provision is very high. They benefit from a daily menu of exciting learning activities both within and outside the classroom and make very good progress. Communication with parents is a strength. Because of this there is a strong culture of partnership which has a very positive impact on the children's achievements in their first year at school.
- The quality of teaching in the school has improved since the last inspection. Staff are confident and knowledgeable. It was clear to me that no one was 'playing safe' during my visit, with lively classrooms and pupils enjoying their learning through a broad range of activities throughout the day.
- Through their monitoring school leaders have identified that some staff could challenge and support pupils more through better-quality questioning and feedback. During my visits to classrooms it was plain to

see where this aspect of teaching is strong and where it is less well developed. This is already a priority for school improvement.

- The school's phonics provision is improving after a dip in the numbers reaching the expected standard in Year 1 last year. Staff have benefited from bespoke training and visits to a local outstanding school, leading to a review of how phonics is taught. This has already had an impact. Better outcomes are expected this year, including for those pupils now in Year 2.
- Outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are sound. Pupils make good progress and attain well in both Key Stage 1 and 2. The number of pupils achieving higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 compares favourably to national averages.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do well. Their progress in Key Stage 2 is particularly strong. This is especially the case in reading, where the percentage of disadvantaged pupils making good progress is very high compared to other pupils in the school and nationally.
- Most pupils attend school regularly although there are a small number who are absent on too many occasions. The school has worked hard to address this using a variety of strategies and working closely with outside agencies to support families to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time.
- Pupils told me they enjoy coming to school because they learn about new things every day. They were able to explain their 'learning journeys' and the extra activities, including attending coffee mornings, which are all part of the day-to-day curriculum. Older pupils particularly enjoy 'angel duties', where they are responsible for helping adults or other pupils who need advice or guidance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- phonics provision is further strengthened to ensure better outcomes for pupils
- staff improve the quality of their feedback and questioning so that pupils make better progress, in order for outcomes overall to become outstanding.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Close

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the assistant headteacher, pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors. I spoke with support staff about the safeguarding of children. I also spoke with representatives of both the local authority and the diocese by telephone. Throughout the day I visited every classroom, some more than once. You accompanied me on most of these visits. I observed pupils' behaviour in and around the school, including at lunchtime, and attended an assembly. I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the day and took into account the 62 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 19 freetext responses submitted by parents. I also took account of a letter sent to me by a parent. I took account of the 17 responses to the staff survey. I analysed a wide range of school documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, your own self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings, records of visits by the local authority and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.