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Mrs Joanna Sanchez
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sanchez

Short inspection of St Philip's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Since you were appointed a little over a year ago, you have directed the school highly effectively. You are a strong, inspiring and caring leader. Your vivacious personality motivates staff, pupils and the community. You have high expectations. You evaluate the school accurately and understand very intelligently the key issues it faces, both in terms of the big picture but also more detailed areas of work. You reflect carefully on how you could do things more effectively and you also develop others and help them to learn. They are then able to sustain good practice and make improvements where they are needed.

Staff, governors, pupils and parents are rightly very clear about the high quality of your work. One parent spoke for many, describing you as 'a wonderful headteacher and a breath of fresh air; always with a smile and happy nature whilst also able to deal with all the demands and changes a headteacher faces'. A member of the support staff wrote, 'Our school has a fantastic leader, with a real sense of purpose and vision... she has brought stability, together with an excitement about the journey we are on.' An infant pupil simply said of the school, 'It's fun. I like everything.'

Working with the new and effective team of senior leaders you appointed, you have established a clear vision for the school. The forming of the school's mission statement, which involved the whole school community, has been very successful in guiding the school's work. This statement clearly highlights the school's Christian ideals. The strong values and the compassionate, caring ethos from this pervade

the school, engage people, and help bring firm improvement. For example, at the last inspection, the school was recommended to improve its teaching of phonics (linking letters and sounds) and to ensure pupils' behaviour needed to be managed less by staff, with more responsibility taken by pupils themselves. Both have been achieved well, with notable recent developments. Pupils are keen to learn and concentrate well in lessons. Phonics teaching is well organised and pupils achieved well in the 2015 Year 1 screening.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe are appropriate and well managed. Staff are regularly trained in safeguarding procedures, which they clearly understand. Safeguarding is a standing item on the agenda of meetings of staff and has a very high profile. Pupils who need any particular support receive it in a timely way. The school makes systematic checks on staff and others who come into contact with the children, when they are recruited and as needed. The school keeps clear and up-to-date records of these checks. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding is diligent in checking the school's processes. Pupils generally feel safe and secure in their school.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make good progress in English and mathematics throughout the school. In 2015, they made good progress and reached above average standards in the national assessments at ages 5, 7 and 11.
- However, in Year 6 in 2015, too few pupils reached the higher levels in writing and mathematics. You were rightly dissatisfied with this, as were governors. You have taken firm action to raise aspirations, and the level of challenge, for all pupils. The writing and mathematical work I saw in the school during the inspection was of a good standard. Pupils continue to make good and improving progress in English and mathematics.
- The pupils who read to me did so with confidence and accuracy. They were able to 'sound out' words accurately, and self-correct, applying strong phonics skills. They showed enjoyment in their reading and good levels of comprehension. Their books were challenging and interesting to them. Younger pupils in particular are helpfully heard to read by adults in the school and by their parents. The school's test results in reading are good.
- Disadvantaged pupils who are entitled to the support of the pupil premium generally achieve well in English and mathematics. However, both you and the governor responsible are rightly not fully satisfied, as some pupils do not do as well as they could. Pupil premium funding is spent sensibly. The expenditure is generally evaluated by how well the pupils fare in national tests. We agreed that it would be valuable to use a wider set of indicators.
- The teaching and provision for pupils with special educational needs or disability is good and improving. It is well managed. These pupils achieve well.
- You work hard to improve teaching and to sort out inconsistencies and weaker practice. You, and your senior team, are a positive presence around the school

and in lessons. You coach and support the staff successfully. Formal procedures for the management of staff performance are well established and effective.

- Some parents are understandably concerned about recent changes of staff in some classes. You manage this turnover well but you and the governors accept that there has, nevertheless, been some discontinuity.
- In the lessons we observed together, teachers and other adults explained things clearly to the pupils. They made sure that pupils had purposeful and interesting work which was suitable for their needs. Pupils were consistently well engaged in their learning and thoughtful about it. They enjoyed helping others and sharing their ideas together. The classrooms are attractive and stimulating places for learning. The school also makes some valuable use of learning outside the classroom, including residential visits.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They work and play happily together. They behave well in lessons. They are pleased about this and how it enables them to concentrate. In the lessons we observed together, pupils showed real interest and settled well to their tasks. There was a 'buzz' of enthusiasm for learning around the school.
- In only one lesson did I observe pupils losing interest and concentration. This was in a Year 6 lesson in which pupils had to pick out examples of the past progressive tense. The teacher taught with apparent enthusiasm and imagination but pupils nevertheless became distracted and started to fidget.
- Some parents and staff raised concerns about pupils' behaviour. Usually these related to instances of unkind behaviour which they feel are allowed to persist. We discussed together the importance of dealing with such matters quickly and being seen to do so.
- The Reception class is well organised. Staff assess the children thoroughly and use their knowledge of each child to plan suitable activities. Exciting equipment and resources are readily available indoors and out. I saw adults interacting positively and productively with the children, helping their learning forward.
- Pupils' attendance is generally good for all groups. Attendance for pupils with special educational needs or disability has improved from a lower point. The rate of exclusion is very low.
- Middle leaders, who are usually responsible for one or more subjects in the school, work hard together. They ensure that pupils enjoy a broad and carefully planned curriculum. There is more to do to sharpen and develop their work, so that it improves outcomes for pupils further. For example, the subject leaders are not yet fully accountable for outcomes in their subjects. They do not know in detail how well the pupils are doing where there is not test data. They need to continue to build up their own subject-specific expertise.
- You evaluate the effectiveness of the school accurately. The school improvement plan is an effective working document. You follow the right set of priorities. An important task now is to sharpen up further still some of the management systems you use to bring the priorities to fruition. For instance, currently there is not a sharp method for evaluating how well the school and pupils are doing in areas the school is working on. An example is aspects of pupils' behaviour, where there is not readily available hard data.

- The governing body is well organised. It supports and challenges you aptly. Governors visit the school often and know at first-hand about the things that matter most, such as the quality of leadership and teaching, safeguarding and the performance of different groups of pupils.
- The local authority supports the school helpfully. St Philip's works well within its local cluster of schools and with other Catholic schools across a wider area.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the roles of middle leaders and their impact on pupils' learning are developed and improved further
- school management systems, including the way that specific improvements are checked on, are even more sharply focused in helping the school achieve its priorities most efficiently.

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

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited lessons in all classes in the school at least twice each, jointly with the headteacher. I scrutinised pupils' work. I talked to pupils and heard some of them, from Years 2 and 5, read. I observed around the school and on the field at lunchtime. I held meetings with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, governors and an officer of the local authority. I took careful account of the 70 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included many written comments. I also considered confidential responses from members of staff to Ofsted's questionnaire. I evaluated documents, including the school improvement plans, information about pupils' progress and minutes of meetings.