

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



16 November 2016

Julie Curtis
Executive Headteacher
St Dominic CofE VA School
St Dominic
Saltash
Cornwall
PL12 6SU

Dear Mrs Curtis

Short inspection of St Dominic CofE VA School

Following my visit to the school on 3 November 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 July 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 took up your post as executive headteacher of St Dominic CofE VA School, which is part of a federation with St Mellion School, in September 2015. You bring to your role experience as the leader of a nearby outstanding teaching school, Sir Robert Geffery's School, and as a national leader of education. You are very ably supported by the head of schools in the federation who is responsible for the day-to-day running of St Dominic; she also took up her post in September 2015. Together, you work very well as a team and have a clear insight into the school's strengths and also into the areas that you have rightly identified as needing further work. Consequently, after a period of uncertainty in senior leadership, you have both given the school a renewed and clear strategic direction. For example, the quality of school development planning has improved. It is now closely linked to other key aspects of the school's work, such as performance management and the improvement of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The federation has a single governing body which acts as the local governing body of St Dominic School. Governors are developing their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in providing strategic oversight. Recent changes to the governing body, accompanied by a diocesan review of governance and a skills audit, have increased the capacity of the governing body. For example, governors' visits to the school are now more focused and linked closely to the priorities in the

school's development plan. Governors are actively considering strengthening the partnership with Sir Robert Geffery's School as they plan for the future development of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

St Dominic is a small school and you and the staff have established a culture of vigilance based on all staff knowing the needs and any vulnerabilities of all pupils very well. Staff are thus well placed to identify quickly any pupil that might be potentially at risk and are able to put into practice the concept of early help enshrined in the government's latest guidance, 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September 2016). Governors are also clear about their responsibilities with respect to safeguarding and the nominated safeguarding governor brings expertise as a serving police officer to that role. All staff training is up to date and the single central register of checks on the backgrounds of staff and their suitability to work with children is in good order.

Inspection findings

- Pupils are making good progress in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics, and also in science. Effective teaching is promoting this progress. Such teaching is characterised by constructive questioning and good use of the technical vocabulary of the particular subject under consideration. Teachers are precise in their use of language and expect pupils to display the same precision. This helps pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of key concepts, whatever the subject.
- In the 2016 national curriculum assessments at key stage 1, undertaken by pupils currently in Year 3, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard and working at greater depth were at least equivalent to the national average. Performance in mathematics was particularly strong. These pupils are clearly well prepared to make further progress in key stage 2.
- In the key stage 2 national curriculum assessments, attainment was below average. Nonetheless, pupils had made good progress from what were low starting points. School leaders are aware, however, that improving attainment at key stage 2, whatever pupils starting points, is a key priority.
- A particular focus of the inspection was the work of the most able pupils. Their work in English is characterised by extended writing which demonstrates the ability to produce complex sentences, fluent prose, efficient paragraphing and sound punctuation. In mathematics, they can solve problems in a variety of ways, discuss the merits of each one and explain why they have chosen one method in particular. Overall, teaching effectively addresses the needs of these most able pupils and they are making good progress as a result. This includes the most able disadvantaged pupils who work well with their most able peers; in some cases their work demonstrates rapid and sustained progress over time.

- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. They are supported well in the classroom, including by the work of teaching assistants and other adults. The quality of the school's analysis of the impact of the pupil premium on the academic outcomes of disadvantaged pupils is improving. On some occasions, such as in key stage 1 mathematics, disadvantaged pupils are performing at or above the national average for other pupils. For the last three years, all disadvantaged pupils have passed the Year 1 phonics screening check.
- Attainment in science is a strength of the school at both key stages 1 and 2. There was no science teaching taking place during this short inspection visit, but a sample of work by pupils in Years 5 and 6 was scrutinised. This showed clear evidence of the positive impact of teaching over time. As was the case in other subjects, science teaching is characterised by a precise use of the technical vocabulary; this means that pupils have a solid understanding of the key concepts they are studying.
- The school works well to develop pupils' reading skills as well as a love of reading. The most able readers can read with fluency and feeling, dealing with sophisticated texts ably. Other readers show a determination to improve their reading and demonstrate that they can use phonics to deal with difficult or unfamiliar words. All pupils who were asked said that they read regularly at home as well as in school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attainment of pupils in key stage 2, especially those with low starting points, improves further
- governors develop further their understanding of their role of strategic oversight in order to provide the challenge and support that school leaders need in their drive for school improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held a number of meetings with you and the federation's head of schools. I also had a meeting with members of the federation's governing body, including the chair of governors. I spoke on the telephone to the school's improvement partner and to a representative of the diocese of Truro. Jointly with you and the head of schools, I undertook observations in lessons and scrutinised work in pupils' books. During these activities I took the opportunity to talk to pupils about their learning and their experiences of the school. I also listened to a number of pupils from across the age and ability ranges reading aloud. I examined records of pupils' academic performance over time and documents provided by the school on its website. I took into account the 16 responses to the online survey of parental opinion, Parent View. I also examined the results of the staff and pupil surveys.

In particular, the inspection focused on the following key lines of enquiry:

- How well do pupils attain and make progress across the key stages?
- How effectively do school leaders ensure that the most able pupils make rapid progress?
- How rapidly do school leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress?
- Why is attainment in science so high?
- How effective is safeguarding?