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29 November 2016

Mrs Margot Buller
Executive Headteacher
St Martin's Catholic Primary School
Pendennis Avenue
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RG4 6SS

Dear Mrs Buller

Short inspection of St Martin's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 March 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 joined St Martin's in September 2014 during a time of great change. Since then, you have steered the school skilfully to a position of strength, and are determined to make it even better. You know the school well, and work creatively with governors and the diocese to make best use of resources, so that pupils are safe, happy and achieve well. You and your staff are ambitious for pupils to make even better progress, and work hard to make improvements where needed.

Pupils enjoy coming to your school and learn well across a range of subjects. They like the way teachers explain new ideas to them, check they understand and give them useful resources that help them with their learning. They are confident that adults will give them extra help with work they find difficult. As a result, pupils make good progress which can be seen in the high-quality work in their books.

Pupils and parents recognise and appreciate the strong sense of community in their school. Pupils say that people are kind and help each other, and do not make fun of people who are different to them. Pupils understand the consequences of not meeting the high expectations for their behaviour. As a result, almost all pupils behave well both in and out of lessons, although some pupils and parents report that a small number of pupils do not always behave as well as they should.

Since the last inspection, leaders have worked to improve further the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Staff have increasingly high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leadership of teaching and learning has been strengthened, and teachers make good use of expertise within and beyond the school to improve their work. Teachers use aspirational texts to inspire pupils and this helps pupils to write with increasing sophistication and stamina. Pupils use their writing skills equally well in their topic, science and religious education (RE) work.

Leaders recognise that there is work to do to improve the school further. Parents need reassurance about how changes to the leadership structure, including federating with another local primary school, will make the school even better for their children. While teachers recognise strengths and areas for improvement in pupils' work, they need to refine how accurately they identify whether pupils are working below, in line with or above expectations. This will help teachers to track pupils' learning more carefully and keep parents informed about their child's progress. You identified that the number of pupils achieving the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check last year was untypically low, and that pupils made less progress in writing than they did in mathematics and reading. You have acted swiftly to address these areas and recognise that you need to maintain focus on them so that outcomes improve for pupils currently at the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are safe and well cared for in your school. Parents say that their children are happy and keen to come to school, where they look after and are kind to each other. Staff know pupils well, which helps them to nurture and support them. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, such as on the internet and in the community, and are confident that adults will help them with any worries that they have.

Leaders ensure that all staff understand and fulfil their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. Relevant policies and training are updated regularly to ensure that staff are effective in their roles. You keep appropriate records of information about children whose circumstances make them vulnerable and how staff support them.

Inspection findings

- You, governors and the diocese work together well to strengthen leadership in areas of the school which most need to improve. The new phonics coordinator is providing a swift and robust response to last year's unusually low results in the Year 1 phonics screening check. The special educational needs coordinator works effectively to support the increasing numbers of pupils who have significant learning difficulties.
- Leaders use every opportunity to work in collaboration to improve the school. Teachers work closely with each other and colleagues in the partner school to share good practice. The local authority provides effective support to your small school, helping new leaders to develop their skills and expertise.
- Governors' wealth of experience and skills enables them to identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They challenge you and your staff to

make it even better, working closely with governors from your partner school and recognising the benefits that forming a federation between the two schools will bring. Governors are trained appropriately and carry out their statutory responsibilities effectively.

- Parents report that their children are safe, happy and make good progress at your school. They are less confident about how the school is led and how any concerns they have are dealt with. They reflect that communication needs to improve, which is clear from the school's website, which is not up to date or easy to access. You are aware of this and have taken steps to improve communication in the longer term, but could act more quickly to resolve some of these concerns.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good across the school. The deputy headteacher makes regular visits to classrooms to observe learning and look at pupils' work, and evaluates accurately the strengths and areas for improvement. Teachers benefit from coaching which improves their practice, and are held to account for the progress of pupils in their class.
- Staff training, supported by expertise from the local authority, is improving the way in which phonics is taught. Staff use a consistently effective approach to delivering phonics, and the phonics coordinator checks regularly to see the difference this is making. Her work with parents helps pupils to be supported at home as well as at school.
- Pupils read well for their age and enjoy visiting the library to choose new books. Those who are less able readers are confident to tackle difficult books, and use their skills to sound out unfamiliar words. Pupils of all abilities read with good levels of comprehension.
- Pupils in the Reception class have settled in to the school well. They respond appropriately to clearly established routines, and play together cooperatively, sharing toys and taking turns. This is helping them to make progress with their learning.
- Pupils' writing is good and improving across their subjects. Teachers use complex texts such as Shakespeare in Year 4 to inspire pupils and help them develop their technical understanding. Pupils practise their writing skills in a range of subjects, including RE, science and topic work, and their work is of a consistently high quality and shows the good progress they are making.
- By the end of key stage 2, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. A higher than average proportion of the most able pupils achieve a greater depth of learning in reading and mathematics than is the case nationally. Leaders recognise that further work is needed to raise middle- and high-ability pupils' achievement in writing, so that it is as good as for others nationally with the same starting points.
- Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, attend school regularly. School staff track attendance carefully, contacting home promptly if pupils do not arrive at school. Very few pupils are persistently absent.
- In the past, pupils' progress and achievement in writing have been less than their very good progress in reading and mathematics. Although school performance information suggests that pupils in Year 5 and 6 are not currently on track to be working at the expected standard by the end of the year, their work shows better progress. Leaders recognise the need to do further work with staff to check their

assessments of pupils' work, so that they more accurately reflect the work produced.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- communication with parents continues to improve so that parents have increased confidence in the leadership of the school
- teachers assess pupils' work with more consistent accuracy, so that plans for future learning are targeted more closely on individual pupils' needs
- work to improve progress in both phonics and writing makes a difference, so that more pupils learn to a greater depth across all their subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Along with you and your deputy headteacher, I visited each classroom to watch the learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. I also looked at work from some pupils in Year 3 and Year 6. I met with you, your deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, administration officer, local authority representative and a group of governors, and spoke to the diocesan adviser on the telephone. I spoke to parents and carers on the playground at the start of day, and considered 40 responses to the Parent View questionnaire, including 35 free-text responses. I met a group of pupils and listened to some of them reading, as well as observing pupils around the school and in the playground. I took into account 31 responses to the staff survey. I reviewed a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, information on pupils' progress, records of checks on the quality of teaching, the school website and a number of policies. I checked safeguarding arrangements, including the school's record of recruitment checks, the safeguarding policy, a child protection case study and staff training records.

During the inspection, the focus of my work was to consider:

- how effectively leaders fulfil their duties
- how well the teaching of phonics and writing is helping pupils to improve in these areas of their learning

- how well leaders ensure that pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable, are kept safe and attend school regularly
- whether different groups of pupils currently in the school continue to make good progress across the curriculum.