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Dear Mrs Horne

Short inspection of St Philip's Catholic Primary School, Arundel

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has improved the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your staff and governors have a very clear vision for the school that promotes high aspirations in an exceptionally caring and nurturing environment. You took over as headteacher in September 2014 and appointed several new staff since then, including your deputy headteacher, who started this year. You have built a very strong and cohesive team, who are all clearly focused on achieving the very best for each pupil.

As headteacher, you provide inspirational leadership together with a warm and welcoming manner, which is recognised and highly valued by pupils, staff, parents and the local authority. You have been proactive in tirelessly promoting the school in the local community and so have ensured that pupil numbers have risen following a dip in 2014. As one parent commented, 'There is no doubt that our school has flourished since Mrs Horne became headteacher'.

St Philip's is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Over recent years, there has been some turbulence as a significant proportion of pupils either left or joined the school. This means that there can be variability in each year group and therefore caution is needed when making comparisons to national averages. Yet historical progress information over time indicates that reading skills are particularly strong, and pupils make progress in writing and mathematics at least in line with age-related expectations. Provisional 2016 results demonstrate that attainment in reading and mathematics is in line with national levels at key stage 1. The

proportions of Year 1 pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics check and children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception Year are well above national levels. However, provisional 2016 key stages 1 and 2 results show that pupils' progress in writing was below national standards. This is no longer the case for pupils currently in the school. Your improved assessment and tracking systems have enabled teachers to focus their teaching on improving writing skills for pupils. You are aware that more could be done to ensure that a greater proportion of the most able pupils achieve the highest standards in writing and apply their skills across the wider curriculum.

St Philip's offers a warm and welcoming community where pupils are known as individuals by staff, who take great care to support the academic and pastoral development of them all. The school offers a broad curriculum enriched and extended through regular forest school activities, visitors and events. Parents were effusive in their praise for staff, who willingly offer extra time to deliver a wide range of popular activities and clubs, including archery, arts and crafts, cooking, football, netball, skateboarding and social clubs. Pupils value opportunities to take on extra responsibility by becoming 'faith buddies' to support younger pupils or being on the school council. Supporting pupils' personal development is clearly a strength of the school.

The school has improved since the last inspection because you, your staff and governors use your accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school to prioritise actions to take. You have taken effective action to strengthen teaching throughout the school. Staffing is stable, and well-targeted training and productive partnerships with other local schools enable staff to develop their subject knowledge and teaching skills. As a result, the quality of teaching and outcomes have improved and staff morale is high.

You provide governors with a detailed understanding of the school. They use accurate tracking and assessment information together with regular visits to the school to identify strengths and areas for development. Your school improvement plans have clear objectives and are appropriately focused. Consequently, standards are improving and all groups of current pupils are making strong progress. Leaders and governors agree that school plans and governors' records of meetings could be further improved to offer more evaluative reflections of current progress and clearer expectations of next steps. This will assist the school to make more rapid progress in its quest to achieve outstanding outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that a culture of safeguarding and vigilance permeates throughout the school. Your safeguarding policy draws on the most up-to-date guidance and is tailored to fit the school. It explains clearly how all members of the community are responsible for safeguarding. Regular staff training ensures that they are confident and know what to do should they be worried about a pupil. Detailed records show that any concerns about pupils are followed up rapidly and school leaders work well with other agencies to help pupils and families receive the

support they need. Parents recognise this level of care and support: 'My child is incredibly happy at St Philip's. It feels like an extended family. I know that he is safe, well cared for and receives a stretching and rounded education. He loves going to school every day!'

Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average. You recognise that some groups, including disadvantaged pupils, had lower attendance rates or punctuality in the past. You have worked closely with outside agencies and the families to support improvements. Bullying and discrimination are extremely rare. Almost all pupils and parents report that children feel safe and well looked after at St Philip's Catholic Primary School, and they know whom to go to should they have any concerns. As several of the pupils told me during the inspection, 'It feels nice to be here' and, 'We make good friends here.'

Inspection findings

- You give the school clear, purposeful and highly effective leadership. Parents and staff are keen to share their respect for you and your staff. One parent spoke for many when they commented: 'This is an absolutely wonderful school. The quality of leadership and teaching is of the highest level and the school is welcoming and accessible to all. It is a real pleasure to bring my daughter here each day.' Another added, 'This is a rare gem of a school'.
- There is a strong sense of respect and equality of opportunity throughout the school. Leaders ensure that pupils' social, moral and spiritual development, underpinned by the school's Christian values, are at the heart of learning. This firmly supports and promotes British values. Pupils are well aware of equality and confidently explain that everyone should be treated with respect. As one parent explained, 'One of the main strengths of the school is its strong ethos of caring for others and working together to grow as individuals...' However, some pupils are less confident to articulate their understanding of different faiths and cultures. More could be done to ensure that their cultural development matches their outstanding levels of spiritual, social and moral development.
- Your vision for school improvement rightly focuses on providing a rich and creative curriculum together with an exceptionally caring and inclusive community environment. One of the main strengths of the school is how well it nurtures pupils' spirituality and sense of awe and wonder. As a result, pupils are confident, articulate and ambitious. Many told me that they feel a real sense of belonging, describing school as being 'like a family'. When touring your school, it is quite apparent how proud pupils are in their work and achievements. Pupils are kind, considerate and empathetic. Their behaviour and conduct around the school is exemplary.
- Subject leaders work effectively to support and challenge the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Good relationships with other local schools enable the sharing of best practice. Leaders then ensure that regular coaching and training have helped these ideas and resources to be shared across the school, and supported staff development.
- Working together, leaders and governors have taken decisive steps to address

the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The quality of teaching seen during this inspection together with historic progress information, the school's evidence about pupils' strong progress and the work in pupils' books all indicate that teaching in the school is securely good. Reading skills across the school are high. A clear focus on writing and mathematics skills has ensured higher standards for current cohorts than in recent years. There is compelling evidence of high levels of challenge for the most able, and leaders are keen to improve standards still further.

- There is strong teaching in the early years and a drive to improve outcomes still further. The rich and colourful learning environment offers a well-organised range of stimulating learning zones. Clear routines and good relationships ensure that no time is wasted as the children transfer between activities seamlessly. Engaging activities and creative teaching ensure that children make good progress in their communication, literacy and mathematics skills.
- Governors are an enthusiastic and effective team. They know St Philip's well and offer useful support to you and the leadership team. Appreciating the importance of succession planning, governors have recently conducted an audit of their skills and engage in regular training from the local authority and other providers. Governors are aware that sharper and more evaluative records of their meetings would assist them to offer greater levels of challenge to leaders and support increased rates of school improvement.
- In 2016, as yet unvalidated school figures show the proportion of children that achieved a good level of development by the end of the early years continues to be above the national average. Similarly, more pupils in Year 1 than in most schools typically achieve the expected standard in the phonics check. Historically, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 have been in line with national figures. This was maintained in 2016, but achievement in writing was not as strong as in reading and mathematics. Standards by the end of Year 6 were in line with national expectations in 2014 and 2015. In 2016, the proportion of Year 6 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was provisionally much lower than national expectations, with achievement in writing being particularly low.
- You have been very effective in raising standards of writing across the school. As a result, most-able pupils in Year 3 confidently analyse their own writing and read it out loud, demonstrating how to place emphasis within their own storytelling. Year 4 books contain extended writing with phrases such as 'Bilbo Baggins loved his quiet, peaceful life', demonstrating an understanding of structure and characterisation. By Year 6, pupils' neatly presented English books demonstrate regular extended pieces of writing in a lively style. Staff are ensuring that extended written work incorporates what pupils learn in their spelling, punctuation and grammar lessons although more needs to be done to improve spelling.
- Pupils are not yet routinely applying their skills to produce in-depth writing in science and across the curriculum. You agree that more could be done to challenge still higher standards of writing and writing at greater depth across a

wider range of subjects.

- You recognised the need to improve the quality of mathematics teaching and learning, and have done so. Although in 2016, Year 6 mathematics progress was below national averages, work in current pupils' books, together with the learning witnessed during the inspection, clearly demonstrated the strong progress that children are now making across the school. Older pupils develop a depth of knowledge and understanding in mathematics.
- Teachers use their good subject and assessment knowledge to design stimulating lessons. They focus clearly on intended learning and give pupils helpful guidance and feedback which they use to modify and improve their work. Teachers and teaching assistants routinely use probing questions and high-quality discussions to develop pupils' understanding. As a result, pupils clearly enjoy their time in school and are highly motivated to do well.
- Phonics teaching is consistent across key stage 1 and Reception classes so that pupils achieve well. Teachers and teaching assistants have strong subject knowledge, high expectations and are skilled in modelling phonic techniques to the pupils. This has allowed you to group pupils and focus teaching to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils make rapid progress in their reading skills and develop a love of reading.
- You monitor the progress of all pupils very effectively. The assessment of pupils' learning identifies the work covered and how well this has been understood by the pupils. Leaders and teachers quickly pinpoint any pupils at risk of underachieving and then design and implement bespoke additional support where needed. This is most effective in upper key stage 2, for example in the challenging mathematics teaching being offered to a group of most-able Year 5 pupils. This approach has significantly diminished any differences between the achievement of the very small numbers of disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils and others.
- There is caring and effective leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who require intervention to help them catch up. Leaders identify any pupils at risk of underachievement and work closely with teachers and teaching assistants to plan and deliver a range of bespoke actions to meet individual needs. Good communication with parents helps to shape this support. As a result, this group make strong progress and develop self-confidence and independent learning skills. Leaders are aware that the quality of the special educational needs policy and information report could be improved.
- The local authority provides the school with useful and effective support. Through enabling access to English and mathematics networks and forging links with other schools in the locality, leaders have focused sharply on improvements to the quality of teaching.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of writing and spelling continues to improve across the school, particularly in science and the wider curriculum
- teachers continue to raise the aspirations and level of challenge for the most able
- more robust analysis of current progress and policies, together with evaluative record-keeping, supports governors to challenge further improvements and leaders to achieve outstanding outcomes for the school.

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

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this visit, I looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision including: safeguarding arrangements; the achievement of children in the early years; the progress pupils make in mathematics and writing; and how effectively the school meets the needs of specific groups, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs. I met with you, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, five members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Jointly with yourself, I visited classes to look at teaching and learning. I listened to some pupils read and looked at pupils' work in their exercise books. I had a meeting with a small group of pupils and spoke to several of them informally during break. I took into account 62 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents at the beginning of the day. I also considered 38 responses to the pupil survey and nine responses to a staff survey. I looked at a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, information about pupils' learning and progress, minutes of meetings and records regarding safeguarding and attendance.