

24 May 2018

Mr Phillip Hallman
Headteacher
St Martin's Catholic Primary School
St Martin's Lane
Murdishaw
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 6HZ

Dear Mr Hallman

Short inspection of St Martin's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide inspirational leadership for your staff. You hold them closely to account while, at the same time, giving them the freedom to develop their own ideas and trusting them to exercise their responsibilities without unnecessary interference. As a result, leadership at every level in the school is strong. Morale is very high, as the responses to the staff survey clearly show. Parents also hold the school in high regard, as was evident from their comments to me and in their responses to Parent View.

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school, that they are taught well and that they make good progress. They are articulate, interested, enthusiastic and very well behaved. Discussions in classrooms and work in books show that by the time they reach Year 6 they are adept at presenting well-reasoned arguments and are not afraid to express their own opinions. They listen carefully to others' ideas, even when they do not necessarily agree with them. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent.

The governors are knowledgeable and committed. They manage the budget well and make good use of the additional funding to support the development of physical education and sports in the school. Because of its success in supporting disadvantaged pupils, Her Majesty's Inspectors in the North West region invited the school to contribute to a project for disseminating good practice in this area of work. The governors provide you and the staff with an appropriate balance of

support and challenge. They recognised that the website needs to be updated to ensure that it includes all the required information.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to: increase the proportions of pupils making at least good progress; ensure that pupils are given work that is the right level of difficulty for them; ensure that action plans are clear and measurable; hold all teachers to account for pupils' progress; and identify underperforming pupils early and provide them with quick and effective support. You have addressed each of these areas rigorously and successfully.

Pupils enter the school with abilities below those expected for their age but leave performing at, or above, the national averages. Therefore, during their time with you, they make good progress. During the inspection, I saw evidence of the strong progress which current pupils make. Those in Year 6 are further forward than their counterparts last year, with more of them attaining the higher standards. This is, to a considerable extent, a result of the increased challenge that teachers are providing for them. The great majority of pupils who responded to the online questionnaire said that teachers gave them challenging work and helped them to do their best. All the parents who completed Parent View said that their children are taught well and make good progress at the school. Their views were borne out by the work seen in pupils' books. You have set very precise goals for improvement. These are reflected in the performance management targets which ensure that all teachers are held to account for the achievement and progress of the pupils in their charge. The electronic system for checking on pupils' progress is now well established. Teachers use this effectively to identify pupils who are falling behind, so that they receive appropriate, additional support in a timely way.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. It covers all areas of the national curriculum and is supplemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and visits which the pupils clearly enjoy. You place appropriate emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You and the governors agreed that pupils would benefit from meeting people from a wide range of faiths and cultures, to prepare them further for life in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

All the pupils who spoke to me or who completed the online questionnaire said that they feel safe at school. All the parents I met said that children are safe at the school, as did all the staff and almost all the parents who completed the online surveys. The pupils told me that they are taught about road and rail safety and how to keep safe near water. They also understand the potential dangers of the internet and social media and what to do if they encounter unsuitable material. They know which staff to contact if they have any worries and are confident that they will receive the help they need. Because of regular practices, pupils know what to do in the case of a fire. They say that bullying does take place but is dealt with promptly. These pupils had never encountered any racist bullying in school.

All staff and governors have received up-to-date training on safeguarding. The staff

I spoke to know precisely what to do if they have any concerns about the safety of a child. The school has appropriate systems to check on the suitability of staff to work with children. The site is secure and access to the building is carefully controlled. Case studies show that the school works very closely and successfully with a range of external agencies to provide timely support to children and families who need additional support. Staff could account for the whereabouts of every pupil who was absent on the day of the inspection. You give high priority to ensuring the physical and mental health of all pupils and staff.

Inspection findings

- For the last four years, the standards reached by children in early years have been below those typical for their age. I was interested to know the reasons for this; what the school is doing to improve the situation; and how well children currently in the early years are performing. You provided clear evidence that children enter the school with abilities below, or well below, those typical for four-year-olds. During their time in the early years, they make clear progress but are not achieving in line with their peers by the time they move to Year 1. You have made attainment in the early years a priority for development and adopted appropriate strategies to improve the situation, including working with a local teaching school. The impact of this is reflected in the fact that the proportions of pupils reaching a good level of development by the end of their time in early years have increased over the last two years. The children currently in the early years are doing considerably better than their counterparts were at this time last year.
- The second area that I discussed with you was the performance of pupils in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. For the last three years, fewer have reached expected standards than proportions nationally. I wanted to know what accounts for this and how well pupils currently in Year 1 are progressing. You were able to demonstrate that, because of their low starting points, pupils at your school take longer than is typical to develop their linguistic skills. However, because of the considerable focus placed on this aspect during key stage 1, pupils' progress quickens. Therefore, by the time they reach the end of Year 2, their phonic skills are in line with those found nationally. The Year 1 pupils I heard reading did so with accuracy and confidence and had effective strategies for deciphering unfamiliar words.
- The rate of pupils' progress gathers momentum during key stages 1 and 2. Since the last inspection, the proportions of seven- and 11-year-olds reaching the standards expected of their ages have generally compared well with the national picture. I was interested to know whether this positive picture is being maintained. You were able to provide convincing evidence of this. You were also able to demonstrate how the proportions of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics are rising. This is because of the increased focus that teachers have placed on challenging pupils to aim higher.
- In 2015 and 2016, the attendance figures for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities were in the lowest 10% of schools nationally. I wanted to know what you have done to tackle the situation and how well your

current pupils attend. You were able to show me that the comparatively small number of pupils involved accentuated the proportion of absences in the past. Over the last two years, overall attendance and the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have improved and are now above average. The individual case studies that I examined provided impressive evidence of the successful work that your pastoral staff are doing to support parents who have difficulty in getting their children to school regularly and on time.

- I held a meeting with your middle managers to discuss the way that they organise the curriculum. They ensure continuity and progress in pupils' learning in all subjects across the school. An area for further development is the provision of opportunities for pupils to meet people from a wide range of faiths and cultures, so that their understanding of British values is further strengthened.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils meet people from a wide range of faiths and cultures, to prepare them further for life in modern Britain
- the school's website includes up-to-date information on:
 - the barriers to educational achievement and how the pupil premium funding is to be spent on addressing those barriers
 - how much money has been received to develop physical education and sports in the school; how this is to be spent; how the effects will be measured; and how improvements will be sustained
 - the school's complaints procedures.

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

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held a meeting with you and the senior leadership team, to discuss your self-evaluation. I spoke to the chair of the governing body and three governors, as well as to representatives of the local authority and the diocese. You and I visited classrooms to observe teaching and look at books. I discussed behaviour, attendance and safeguarding with two mentors and the family support worker and discussed the organisation of the curriculum with four middle leaders. I met a group

of eight pupils, chosen at random from Years 3 to 6. I spoke to 17 parents as they brought their children to school and examined the 25 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I examined a range of documentation, including your self-evaluation, school development plan and information about safeguarding. In addition, I analysed the 20 responses to the staff survey and the 48 responses to the pupil survey. I spoke to pupils and staff in classrooms and around the school and listened to pupils from Years 1 and 5 reading to me.