

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



23 May 2018

Mrs Carmel Hinton
Principal
St Philip's Catholic Primary School
Messenger Road
Smethwick
West Midlands
B66 3DU

Dear Mrs Hinton

Short inspection of St Philip's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your unrelenting commitment to ensuring that pupils experience an enjoyable, memorable and worthwhile time at St. Philip's is plain to see. You have created a vibrant culture where learning is exciting, teaching is effective and pupils thrive. You make strategic decisions focused on what is best for improving pupils' outcomes. This means that resources are targeted effectively to meet both the academic and the pastoral needs of all pupils. Consequently, pupils make good gains in their learning and typically achieve well over time.

More recently, the school has experienced some staffing turbulence which placed an added burden on leaders' workload. Well supported by three assistant headteachers, you worked exceptionally hard during this period to ensure that any discontinuity in pupils' learning was kept to a minimum. This is just one example of how leaders and staff work collaboratively and flexibly to put pupils' needs first. Staff are dedicated and put a lot of effort into creating a calm, purposeful learning environment where pupils are well cared for.

Pupils enjoy coming to school because teachers help them to see a real purpose for their learning. They behave very well in lessons and work hard. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan meaningful activities that contribute well to pupils' progress and personal development. Leaders' determined efforts to ensure that no pupil is left behind mean that pupils get the right support to prevent them from underachieving. From the well-organised, cheerful breakfast club to the well-attended, fun after-school clubs, pupils benefit from the many opportunities they

have to learn throughout the day.

Governance, while effective, has an element of fragility due to the small number of proactive governors. Nevertheless, the academy committee has a good overview of the school's work and provides an increasing degree of challenge. The recently appointed chair of the academy committee is particularly passionate about giving better support to leaders. He is driving forward an agenda with a renewed focus on how governors can make a positive difference. However, there are several members that fail to attend meetings and do not contribute effectively to the school's strategic direction and development. As a result, the bulk of work is limited, unfairly, to just a few committed governors. The St Catherine of Sienna multi-academy company have yet to resolve this issue.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to further improve the quality of teaching. It continues to be good. This is because leaders collect a wealth of information about the quality of teaching and use it well to identify, and quickly address, any areas for improvement. Teachers value the feedback they receive from leaders, and improve their practice as a result of training and development opportunities. For example, in mathematics, leaders have been successful in enabling teachers to enhance pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills.

In addition, at the last inspection, you were tasked with making improvements to subject leadership. You have brought about significant improvements in this area. Enthusiastic leaders now play an important part in developing their subjects across all classes. They have a good understanding of the standards pupils achieve and lead developments in their subjects well. New subject leaders are inducted effectively into the role by other, experienced subject leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff understand and carry out their responsibilities fully for protecting pupils from harm and ensuring their welfare. They receive relevant safeguarding training and informative weekly updates so they are well prepared in the event of a concern arising. Leaders always take prompt action when they receive a concern, and liaise as necessary with other agencies to make sure that families get the support they need and pupils are protected. However, you accept that the administration of safeguarding records could be much better organised, and some aspects of recording more precise and thorough. Leaders carry out all necessary checks on staff and volunteers to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

You work in a variety of ways to support vulnerable pupils and offer them the help and guidance they need. Older pupils say that, during their time at school, teachers have prepared them well for keeping safe when they leave primary school and have greater independence. They are knowledgeable about e-safety and understand how to reduce the risks of being harmed while online. Pupils also know how to report abuse, and confidently recited the NSPCC Childline number. Pupils believe that

school is a safe place because they have adults that care about them. Incidents of bullying are rare, and when they do occur leaders take decisive action to reduce the likelihood of a repeat occurrence.

Inspection findings

- Typically, over time, key stage 2 pupils do not achieve as well in reading as they do in writing. In 2017, pupils' progress in writing was well above average when compared with the national figure. Progress in reading was average. As a result of this disparity, over the last year leaders have placed a strong focus on improving the teaching of reading. Their work has proved beneficial. Pupils are now much more secure in using and applying a range of reading skills to make better sense of what they are reading. Current pupils are making stronger progress in reading because of more effective teaching and a much clearer understanding about what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers plan stimulating reading activities which capture pupils' interests and enable them to build their understanding of, and apply, discrete reading skills. Pupils talk with confidence about the specific skills they are learning, such as inferring and comparing. For example, older pupils developed their ability to summarise through watching a short film, 'For the Birds', and then writing a summary of the film.
- Pupils' engagement with books and their enjoyment of reading for pleasure, while improving quickly, still requires further attention. Pupils' wider knowledge of a diverse range of authors is more limited and they do not have regular opportunities to share 'good reads' with their peers. Teachers enable pupils to have regular access to the school's library, although pupils are not permitted to take home books that they select from Sandwell's library van. This potentially limits the opportunity for pupils to develop strong reading habits.
- The leadership of reading is strong. On appointment, the leader wasted no time in correctly identifying the barriers pupils faced with reading. He put in place appropriate strategies to improve pupils' reading comprehension and ensured that teachers' knowledge was secure. Teachers' assessment of reading is now a particular strength, and they use this information well to inform the next steps in teaching. Consequently, current pupils are addressing gaps in their knowledge and achieving well.
- Despite many pupils starting school with levels of language lower than typical for their age, they quickly make good gains in their speaking and vocabulary development. Pupils' acquisition of early reading skills is effective. The proportion of pupils passing the Year 1 phonics screening check has been consistently above the national average for the last three years. This achievement means that pupils have the confidence they need to read a range of books accurately and with understanding.
- The most-able readers in key stage 1 read confidently, with some super expression. They use their phonics skills adeptly to work out unknown words. However, some of these pupils have reading books which do not pose enough level of challenge. This holds some of them back from achieving at greater depth

at the end of Year 2. In 2017, the proportion of Year 2 pupils attaining greater depth in reading was below the national average figure.

- Since the time of the last inspection, there has been an increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions. Leaders use exclusion as a last resort, in accordance with the school's policy, and only for the most serious behaviour issues. Leaders keep careful logs of any racist or behaviour incidents and use this information well to target support for individuals, with the aim of minimising the risk of exclusion. You work closely with other agencies, such as the behaviour support team, to seek advice for these vulnerable pupils. Teachers implement strategies effectively, which helps pupils to modify their behaviour.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- as a priority, all safeguarding documentation is well organised and records are appropriately detailed
- teachers further develop the habit of reading for pleasure by encouraging pupils to regularly share their favourite books and authors, and make recommendations to others
- higher-attaining pupils in key stage 1 have access to more challenging reading material
- all academy committee governors equally fulfil their roles and responsibilities, so they all make a stronger, collective contribution to the strategic direction of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I checked all aspects of safeguarding arrangements, including records of recruitment checks and pupils' case notes. I spoke with a range of staff about how they keep pupils safe. I spoke with you and members of your leadership team. I visited classes in almost all year groups to observe teaching and learning, and looked at a range of pupils' work. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, development plan, records of

monitoring, governors' minutes of meetings and pupils' assessment information. I met the chair of the academy committee and spoke on the telephone with another member. I considered three free-text responses from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff or pupil surveys.