

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Rachel Crisp
Headteacher
St Simon's Catholic Primary School
Bosden Avenue
Hazel Grove
Stockport
Cheshire
SK7 4LH

Dear Mrs Crisp

Short inspection of St Simon'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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

St Simon's Primary School has a warm, friendly atmosphere and everybody is made to feel welcome. Since your appointment in April 2016, you have had an extremely positive impact on the school. You have a clear vision for the school's development, and your commitment to continuous improvement is shared by staff and governors. You are determined that every pupil is given the best opportunities to succeed.

You have built a strong leadership team, despite the large turnover of staff during the past two years. Accountability is clear and there are good lines of communication. You work closely with governors, who are knowledgeable about the school and make a strong contribution to the school's effective leadership through their own monitoring. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school. All members of staff who responded to the Ofsted survey said that they feel well supported, and that the school is well led and managed.

The pupils who I met with during this inspection were very polite, happy and keen to talk to me about how much they enjoy school. The Year 6 pupils talked with great excitement about their recent trip to the police museum, where they gained a good understanding of how the British legal system works. They were equally enthused by their outdoor pursuits residential visit, when they had the opportunity to try out a range of sports, including canoeing.

Parents are also highly supportive of the school. One parent wrote on Parent View: 'I am incredibly happy with the education, both academically and pastorally, that my children are receiving. They love St Simon's and so do I!'

There have been many changes to the school since the previous inspection. Three newly qualified teachers were appointed in September 2016. Two middle leaders were appointed in September 2017, one who leads key stage 2 and has responsibility for English, and the other who leads key stage 1 and takes responsibility for mathematics across the school. There is also a new chair of the governing body.

At the previous inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including the good quality of teaching and pupils' good behaviour. Inspectors asked leaders to further improve pupils' achievement by securing a greater proportion of outstanding teaching throughout the school. You have taken effective action to further improve teaching. Good opportunities have been provided for teachers' professional development and you regularly check on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress through visits to classrooms and reviews of pupils' books. The high quality of work that I saw in pupils' books during this inspection shows that current pupils are making strong and often rapid progress in their learning. However, you recognise that teaching can be improved even further in some year groups, particularly in the wider curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at St Simon's. Staff are vigilant and know what to do if they are concerned about any aspect of a pupil's safety or well-being. As the designated senior person, you ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. You work closely with outside agencies, where appropriate, to support pupils and their families. The school's recording of the actions taken to support pupils' safety and welfare is well documented. There are also thorough procedures for making the necessary checks on all adults who work with pupils at the school. Records of these checks are recorded meticulously. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's safeguarding policies and practice and help to ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry that I explored during this inspection was to establish how successful leaders have been in improving pupils' progress in writing. Results at the end of key stage 2, in 2016 and 2017, indicated that pupils do not make good progress in developing their writing skills. However, I saw evidence during this inspection that current pupils are making strong progress in their writing development. They now have regular opportunities to improve their writing skills, not just in English lessons but in subjects across the whole curriculum. Some of the writing that I saw in upper key stage 2 was of exceptionally high quality, with pupils using the full range of sentence types, appropriate and precise vocabulary, and complex punctuation. Leaders recognise the need to embed these

improvements and ensure that a greater proportion of pupils achieve greater depth in the end of key stage assessments.

- Leaders rightly recognise the link between reading and writing and have worked effectively to promote improvements in reading across the school. Pupils in Year 6 demonstrated an extensive knowledge of children's authors and a good understanding of different genres. The school's own records now show that not only are pupils highly successful at developing their early reading skills but that older pupils now read widely and often and are making strong progress in their reading development. This has helped to support their progress in writing.
- My second line of enquiry related to pupils' progress and achievement in science, as results in this subject have been below the national average for the past two years at the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching in this aspect of the curriculum. I saw evidence of high-quality science work in almost all year groups. Pupils have regular opportunities to plan and carry out science investigations and work scientifically, in groups and individually. They develop their scientific knowledge and understanding well and are able to give detailed explanations and report their findings clearly using appropriate scientific language. Current pupils are making strong progress as a result.
- My third line of enquiry was how well subject leaders monitor and improve their curriculum areas. The high quality of learning, which is apparent across the curriculum in almost all year groups, reflects the school's success in addressing this challenge. Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. Some told me that they particularly enjoy physical education. Many others benefit from music tuition and I saw some good-quality art in pupils' sketch books. Pupils also develop a good understanding of geography and history and the vast majority make strong progress in these subjects. However, this is not the case in all year groups as there is some variability in the quality of teaching and learning in the wider curriculum.
- Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. They recognise that the quality of teaching sometimes varies too much between year groups, and pupils' overall progress, particularly in the wider curriculum, is not as strong as it could be as a result. Leaders have high expectations and have taken strong and timely action to address weaknesses in teaching by providing additional training and support where needed. The regular checks that leaders make on pupils' progress help them to review the impact of this support on pupils' learning. This is supporting the school's commitment to only accepting the best.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate, outlining clearly the strengths of the school and where further improvements can be made. Governors visit the school regularly and receive comprehensive information from leaders to enable them to both support and challenge effectively. They fulfil their responsibilities well and have kept their knowledge and skills up to date by attending regular training. The school's improvement plans are succinct and accurately highlight the areas which need to be improved further. However, these plans do not contain milestones or targets which senior leaders, including governors, could use to review whether or

not actions have had the required impact.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's improvement plan includes clear measurable targets so that senior leaders, including governors, can monitor progress more effectively
- pupils in all year groups make at least good progress, particularly in subjects in the wider curriculum
- improvements to the teaching of writing are consolidated so that a greater proportion of pupils are working at greater depth.

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 Stockport. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the subject leaders for mathematics, English and science. I met with two governors and spoke by video link to the chair of the governing body. I also met with a representative of the local authority. During the course of the day, I visited each classroom to observe teaching and learning, and I also looked at work in pupils' books. I took account of the 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, considered the 10 responses to the staff survey and the 53 responses to the pupils' survey. I reviewed the school's website and considered a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan. I also looked at documents relating to safeguarding.