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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Catherine Doberska
Headteacher
English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School
Dee Road
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire
RG30 4BE

Dear Mrs Doberska

Short inspection of English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 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 November 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 joined the school in April 2018 and have made an impressive start to your headship at English Martyrs'. You lead with passion and the determination to provide the best possible education for the pupils in your care. The newly formed leadership team work effectively together, led by your clear vision for the school. Your team's capacity to drive further improvement is clear to see. You have already gained the trust of the wider community. Staff enjoy working at the school, respect your leadership and, as a result, their morale is high.

Pupils love their welcoming school and say it is easy to make friends at English Martyrs'. Their behaviour and concentration in lessons support their learning well. They are skilled at working together collaboratively. For example, in a Year 4 science lesson on gases pupils listened carefully to each other's ideas about how to plan a fair investigation to find out which was the fizziest drink. Many parents commented on how happy their children are at the school and the approachability of the staff. They appreciate the ways leaders ensure that pupils uphold Christian values and principles in the way they treat others. As one parent wrote: 'Teaching my son how to be a good human being, by example, is something that will shape his personality for the better, for the rest of his life.'

The previous inspection report highlighted the school's many strengths, including good behaviour, effective governance and pupils' strong progress. Leaders have maintained these. In 2017 in Year 6, pupils' progress in mathematics was well-above average. At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that

teachers plan lessons that fully challenge all pupils. Overall, this has been achieved well. Leaders know, however, that teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in writing need to be higher. Leaders were also asked to broaden pupils' horizons through a wide and engaging curriculum. The curriculum at English Martyrs' offers pupils a variety of interesting and memorable experiences. Nevertheless, leaders are not complacent. They acknowledge that the curriculum does not yet link subjects effectively, allowing pupils to apply their English and mathematics skills across the range of learning opportunities.

Governors are ambitious for the school and pupils. They know the school well and provide the right level of support and challenge to leaders. They have been concerned for many years that children join English Martyrs' with skill levels that are below those typical for their age. As a result, leaders opened a Nursery in September 2017 to raise children's attainment and strengthen their progress at this crucial point in their learning. Early indications from leaders' assessment information demonstrate that children in Nursery have made strong progress. My visit to the Nursery showed that children are provided with a variety of interesting and valuable learning activities that are matched well to their needs and interests.

Despite being in post for just 12 weeks at the time of this inspection, you have an accurate and carefully considered view of the school's strengths and priorities. You know that the leadership's evaluation of the impact of school improvements could be sharper. You also acknowledge that leaders are not tracking the progress of groups of pupils from their different starting points closely enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors fulfil their statutory safeguarding duties well. They ensure that staff are trained regularly and that a culture of vigilance permeates the school. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose and day-to-day safeguarding routines are secure. The family support worker is tenacious in her approach to ensuring that the needs of pupils and their families are addressed effectively. To this end, the links with local agencies are strong. The safeguarding governor regularly checks that the school's processes are effective. Staff and governors understand their roles and responsibilities for keeping pupils safe very well.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have any worries. They said that bullying is 'unacceptable at English Martyrs', but when it does happen, 'Teachers sort out the problems quickly.' Pupils have a very strong understanding of what bullying is and, as a result of effective teaching, know strategies for dealing with any bullying they see or experience. Pupils also have a firm knowledge of how to keep themselves safe online. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said their children feel safe in school. As one parent commented: 'We are very happy with the school. It is safe. The teachers are very professional and supportive. The children are very well looked after.'

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed that the focus would be on how well leaders have ensured: that the work set for pupils for reading and writing is at the right level of challenge; the effectiveness of the curriculum; and improvement in the teaching of phonics.
- Teachers plan lessons that motivate, challenge and interest pupils. Scrutiny of pupils' books showed that all are routinely challenged in their reading comprehension tasks. As a result, pupils, including the disadvantaged, make strong progress in reading. Leaders have ensured that teaching strategies to improve writing, including clear teaching sequences and oral rehearsal, are embedded throughout the school. Scrutiny of pupils' writing books, however, showed that some teachers do not always have high-enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Improving outcomes further in writing, including improving pupils' writing across the curriculum, should now be a key focus for leaders. In Year 6 in 2017, middle-attaining pupils made stronger progress than the most able in reading and writing. Leaders acknowledge that their current analysis of pupils' assessments does not track the progress that different groups of pupils make. This limits governors' ability to hold leaders to account.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and there is a clear progression of skills and knowledge in each subject. Pupils say, 'Learning is not boring at English Martyrs.' They appreciate the many enrichment activities that the curriculum offers them, including trips to places of interest, visitors into school and 'terrific topic days'. For example, pupils told me about the recent design and technology themed day to celebrate the royal wedding. They had the opportunity to cook royal-themed biscuits, and design, make and evaluate their royal carriages with axles and wheels. On the day of the inspection, Year 6 pupils were performing a well-rehearsed production for parents. It was evident how much they enjoyed singing, acting and working together as a team. You are very aware, however, that the curriculum does not link subjects well. As a result, pupils do not apply the knowledge and skills learned in one subject to others. Leaders' improvement planning shows that developing the curriculum is a key priority for the school. However, leaders do not analyse sharply enough the impact of their improvement actions, so they do not know what is most effective in strengthening pupils' outcomes. This makes it harder for governors to monitor the progress that the school is making towards its long-term goals.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was below that seen nationally. Leaders have responded swiftly to these results. They have provided effective training to ensure that staff's knowledge of phonics is secure. Teaching, including that by teaching assistants, is precise. Leaders assess pupils' knowledge of phonics regularly to ensure that teaching is appropriate for each individual. As a result, assessment information for the current Year 1 suggests that the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check has risen sharply. Pupils who did not reach the expected standard receive prompt and effective support to catch up.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- larger proportions of pupils are working at age-related expectations and at greater depth in writing
- the analysis of assessment information is strengthened to identify the progress of groups of pupils so that the evaluation of the impact of school improvement is sharper
- the curriculum is further developed so that pupils are challenged to use their English and mathematics skills across different subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's effectiveness. We visited lessons to observe pupils learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. Together, we looked at the quality of pupils' work in their books. I considered 57 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 33 free-text comments. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Responses to the staff and pupil questionnaires were also considered. I also had telephone conversations with representatives from the local authority and your Diocese. I met with the chair of the governing body and four governors. I had a formal meeting with a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school. Meetings were also held with your assistant headteachers and four middle leaders to discuss their impact on school improvement. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements and had a meeting with the family support worker. A wide range of documents was examined, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement planning; information about pupils' progress; and various policies. I also examined the school's website.