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Mrs Janet Tibbits
Headteacher
St Vincent's Catholic Primary School
Vauxhall Grove
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Dear Mrs Tibbits,

Short inspection of St Vincent's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have ensured that the school is a warm, friendly and welcoming learning environment. You have created a good balance between preserving the school's Christian character and improving and prioritising pupils' academic achievement. Pupils develop strong values as they move through the school which contribute well to their personal development. They learn to treat each other with respect and to value diversity. Staff promote tolerance and pupils are free from harassment and discrimination. Pupils understand why British values are important, including democracy and the rule of law. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

It is clear that you know the school well. You are open and honest about the school's strengths and the areas for improvement. The school improvement plan is detailed and clear, and tackles areas of weakness head-on. Your staff have a clear awareness of the school's weaknesses, many of which are incorporated into their performance objectives. You and your team carefully consider the potential value and impact of improvement strategies before committing time and funding to their implementation. You have given subject and phase leaders increasing responsibility for sharing good practice and this is helping to improve teachers' skills and improve pupils' progress.

You have invested considerable time and resources into improving reading across the school and have made early language acquisition a priority. Pupils experience a

range of texts and are exposed to a broad and challenging range of vocabulary. Access to a wide range of reading material helps to improve pupils' reading comprehension skills and provides them with the stimulus to write for a range of purposes. In books and classes, there is evidence that these approaches are improving progress and enabling increasing proportions of pupils to work at a greater depth of understanding.

At the previous inspection, leaders were challenged to improve the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar so that pupils learn how to use language more accurately. Evidence in pupils' books and work on display around the school demonstrate the high expectations that teachers have of pupils. Pupils respond well by taking a great deal of pride in their work. Teachers thoughtfully plan grammar, punctuation and spelling sessions which have a positive impact on pupils' accuracy when writing across a range of subjects. Current pupils' ability to write in well-structured sentences that are properly punctuated and where words are spelled correctly improves significantly as pupils move through the school.

You were also asked to strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that governors' frequent visits to the school are always rigorously focused on improvement priorities and these are fully reported to the rest of the governing body. Governors carry out regular focused visits to the school to gain direct insight into teaching quality, pupils' perceptions about their learning and their progress. Findings arising from visits are reported to governors so that they know what is working well and what must be improved. Such activity coupled to new guidance provided by leaders has ensured that governors have a much stronger understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors with professional experience in areas such as finance, safeguarding and school leadership use their specialist knowledge to provide appropriate support and challenge to improve school outcomes. Governors receive regular information about pupils' progress and question leaders, including subject leaders, on aspects of progress to find out why things are as they are.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding at St Vincent's. You ensure that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and that staff receive the necessary child protection and 'Prevent' duty training on how to keep pupils safe from harm. Staff know exactly what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare and adopt the necessary school procedures, where relevant to do so. Effective recruitment and vetting procedures are in place to ensure that staff employed in school are suitable to work with children.

The curriculum effectively supports pupils' awareness of keeping safe in a range of contexts, such as protecting against extremism. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet, and they are further protected by the internet filtering system used by the school.

Pupils say that they feel safe because, at their school, the majority of pupils are

very well behaved and that bullying is extremely rare. They are confident that they can talk to an adult if they have a concern. Pupils' high levels of attendance reflect their enjoyment of learning and engagement in school life. The small number of parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) overwhelmingly agree that their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make good gains in their learning, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress through each key stage is good. You have introduced a number of interventions and mentoring programmes that have accelerated progress, in particular for a number of middle-attaining pupils in mathematics, who have finished in the top 20% of pupils nationally in two of the last three years. Improvements in teaching, learning and the curriculum have led to increasing numbers of pupils working at higher standards in English and mathematics.
- You are part of a strong cluster of Birmingham Catholic schools who come together to moderate pupils' work. This ensures that judgements made about attainment and progress are secure. This has been beneficial in confirming your judgments, but has also enabled staff to foster links with teachers in the locality.
- Pupils enter school with basic skills that are well below those typical for their age. They make very strong progress in both Nursery and Reception classes and consistently attain well in the national phonics screening check in Year 1, where a higher proportion of pupils attain the expected standard than seen nationally. This is because phonics teaching is systematic and effective. However, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics have been historically inconsistent in Year 1. You have identified that pupils find the transition from Reception to Year 1 more difficult and have made it a focus for your school improvement. You introduced sharply focused plans to ensure that the transition from Reception to Year 1 improves over the next school year; however, the impact of these actions has yet to be seen fully.
- There are some strengths in the wider curriculum. Subject leaders for mathematics and English have been successful in overseeing improvements in both subjects since the last inspection. They are knowledgeable about their subjects and have identified the actions required to improve standards. In addition, pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to learn a musical instrument, and some excellent examples of pupils' artwork are on display around the school. Work in pupils' topic books shows that all curriculum areas are covered. However, the quality of work in these books is mostly of a lower standard than in English and mathematics books. Pupils have not developed the same subject-specific knowledge and understanding across the broader curriculum to achieve the same good standards as in English and mathematics. This is particularly notable in history and geography, where teachers do not routinely ensure that subject-specific knowledge is taught effectively.
- The school's fixed-term exclusions have been historically high when compared to other schools nationally. This is due to a very small number of pupils with significant difficulties, who from time to time need a sanction for their

misdemeanours. Information gathered during the inspection showed that the school's policy on behaviour is applied consistently by teachers and is effectively reducing exclusions. The school has introduced an innovative reward system involving 'Golden stamps' and has a wide range of effective strategies to deal with the few examples of inappropriate behaviour. This has had an impact and the excluded pupils have been successfully rehabilitated into school. Pupils happily reported that they liked the school environment and that the school is 'a great place to be'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- transition arrangements from early years to Year 1 are effective so that pupils build on their strong start in reading, writing and mathematics.
- pupils gain subject-specific knowledge in subjects such as geography and history so that they have a solid foundation for the next stage in their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Max Vlahakis
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior assistant headteacher and your assistant headteacher. I met with four governors, including the chair of governors. I spoke with your local diocese adviser who supports the school. I spoke informally to pupils on the playground and in lessons. I looked at the 10 responses to the Parent View survey and surveys of staff's and pupils' views. We visited lessons together. I evaluated work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and leaders' plans for development. I took into account evidence of pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of school policies, including those for safeguarding and child protection.