

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



28 November 2018

Mrs Janet McKinlay
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Manor Lane
Middlewich
Cheshire
CW10 9DH

Dear Mrs McKinlay

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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 previous inspection. Alongside governors and staff, you have ensured that St Mary's remains a happy and thriving community. The charity work undertaken by pupils and the care that pupils show towards each other are testament to the fact that they live out the school's ethos and values. Pupils are very positive about the school and their learning. They enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer, from yoga to a range of sports and membership of the 'Growing in Faith Together' team.

Parents and carers appreciate all that the school does for their children. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, indicated that they would recommend the school to others. Typical views from parents included: 'The school is an excellent environment for my child's holistic development and progress,' and, 'I cannot fault the school.' Staff are positive about their work. They enjoy being part of a happy community and a school that they feel is improving rapidly. They take pride in their work and are motivated to go on improving the quality of education provided to pupils.

You joined the school at the start of the previous academic year at a time when there had been a notable decline in the attainment and progress of pupils. Since your appointment, you have built a new leadership team that has improved the school with urgency and tact. You have been careful to maintain the school's established strengths. Pupils' behaviour and attendance remain excellent. Pupils also continue to benefit from a rich and varied range of opportunities to enhance

their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

You have ensured that staff share a clear understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. As a team, you have focused on addressing the most pressing issues that were preventing pupils from making greater progress in their learning. In particular, you have made significant improvements to teaching in key stage 1 and the teaching of mathematics throughout the school. As a result, pupils are now making considerably more progress and their attainment has increased significantly. The proportions of pupils attaining the expected standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics now compare favourably to national averages. However, the proportions of pupils attaining the higher standards remain below the national average.

Leaders have made good progress towards addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Middle leaders now play a much greater role in the development of the school. They have undertaken extensive training which has enhanced their leadership skills and their ability to manage effectively. They have become fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's work and the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Despite this, subject leaders have not developed a clear rationale for the design and implementation of the curriculum in their subjects. This has contributed to the weaknesses in the curriculum that remain.

Teachers have become more adept at using questioning to enhance pupils' learning. They now employ a range of strategies and procedures when questioning pupils, which keep all pupils focused and engaged. Teachers are also asking pupils more thoughtful and challenging questions. This helps pupils to think more deeply about their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established a vigilant safeguarding culture throughout the school. You have ensured that staff are well trained and alert to potential signs of neglect or abuse. Staff share a clear understanding of the safeguarding risks that are potentially more prevalent in the school's context, such as the dangers posed online and those risks associated with the school's location close to a canal.

Leaders have ensured that appropriate actions are taken to reduce risk. The school's approach to e-safety is thorough and pupils' awareness of risk has been enhanced through assemblies on topics such as water and road safety.

You and your staff work productively with parents and a range of external agencies, such as the child and adolescent mental health services, to keep pupils safe. Support for pupils' emotional safety and well-being is exemplary.

Leaders have ensured that all records relating to safeguarding are well maintained and that referrals are made, as appropriate, to external agencies.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these looked at the extent to which the most able pupils are being supported to make better progress. We looked at this issue because the proportions of pupils attaining the higher standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 have usually been below national averages in recent years. You have made it a priority to provide greater challenge for the most able pupils. You are embedding a culture of 'learning without limits', which has ensured that teachers now have higher expectations of pupils, including the most able. Where new approaches to teaching have been introduced, such as in mathematics and writing, teachers ensure that the needs of the most able pupils are well met. Where this is the case, the most able pupils are making stronger progress than in the past.
- The most able pupils also benefit from a range of additional support to stretch them further. For example, an extra class for the most able writers in Year 2 has helped these pupils to develop the fluency and technical accuracy of their writing. Despite this, the needs of the most able pupils are not met as well in subjects beyond English and mathematics. In addition, support for the most able pupils is less effective when the approach adopted by teachers is less systematic and provides only intermittent challenge.
- The second line of enquiry focused on the extent to which the curriculum is well planned in subjects beyond English and mathematics. We explored this issue to make sure that pupils' improved attainment in English and mathematics was not being achieved at the expense of their learning in other subjects. We also focused on this area because pupils have not attained well in science over the last few years. You explained your view that you inherited a curriculum that was broad but slightly imbalanced. You have therefore introduced a new curriculum this year to ensure greater coverage of subjects beyond English and mathematics. You have prioritised the improvement of the science curriculum. There is now a greater focus on the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in this subject. As a result, pupils are gaining a deeper scientific understanding.
- The new curriculum delivers a range of subjects, such as art and history, through different cross-curricular topics. Teachers feel that these new topics have enlivened the curriculum and increased pupils' engagement with subjects beyond English and mathematics. Despite this, leaders have not ensured that sufficient attention is paid to the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in some other subjects. Moreover, the new curriculum does not go far enough to redress the slight imbalance in pupils' learning. Pupils now benefit from a broader curriculum, which seeks to offer them a rich and diverse range of knowledge and experiences. However, a comprehensive and systematic approach has not been adopted to the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in different subjects beyond English and mathematics.
- A final line of enquiry looked at the extent to which advances in pupils' attainment in mathematics have been built upon sustainable improvements to the teaching of this subject. In your first year as headteacher, you prioritised the development of mathematics teaching. These improvements enabled pupils to

make greater progress and attain well. Leaders have introduced a more far-reaching approach to improve the teaching of mathematics further this year. Teachers now prioritise the promotion of pupils' mathematical problem-solving and reasoning skills, as well as their ability to conduct mathematical investigations. Teachers are undertaking regular training to enhance and refine their ability to teach in a way that is consistent with these principles.

- The early evidence indicates that the teaching of mathematics is going from strength to strength. Teachers have developed high expectations of pupils' learning in mathematics. They provide pupils of all abilities with work that is well-matched to their needs. Consequently, pupils are making even stronger progress, which is underpinned by clear and sustainable improvements to the teaching of this subject.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the curriculum so that there is a comprehensive and coherent approach to developing pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in subjects beyond English and mathematics throughout the school
- teachers systematically challenge the most able pupils so that a higher proportion of pupils attain the higher standards by the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.

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 Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders. I also met with members of the governing body, including its chair. I spoke with the school's two improvement partners. I met formally with a group of pupils and talked informally with others around the school. I met formally with a group of teachers, all of whom have responsibility for leading different subjects. You accompanied me on visits to classes, where we observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects. I also looked at work produced by pupils throughout the school in a range of subjects.

I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. I also scrutinised a range of policies, the school improvement plan and self-evaluation report. I also looked at the school's website. We considered 20 comments received by Ofsted's free-text facility and 21 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online

questionnaire for parents. I also considered three responses to the staff survey and 16 responses to the pupil survey.