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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Gary Linford
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Manor House Road
Wednesbury
West Midlands
WS10 9PN

Dear Mr Linford

Short inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 2019, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders and governors share your ambition that: 'At St. Mary's, parents, teachers and governors work closely together to ensure that all children fulfil their potential and become valued, confident members of society who demonstrate respect for others.' Leaders at all levels know the school well and astutely identify areas that need to improve. Governors show commitment to their role and understand the need to both support and challenge leaders. They gain first-hand experience of the school and use their findings to check that planned changes bring about the desired effects.

You make leadership development a high priority. School leaders' skills are developed well so that they are ready to take on senior leadership roles in other schools. Middle leadership is becoming increasingly effective. This is due to planned professional development and giving middle leaders opportunities to play a meaningful role in school improvement. Leaders are passionate about raising outcomes for all pupils, including those disadvantaged and with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In order to do so, they are improving the quality of teaching across all subjects.

Classroom visits showed the school to be a happy place. At the time of my visit, the school had suspended its normal timetable and instead, pupils were experiencing a 'Wellness Day' – a series of events focused on promoting mental and physical well-being. Despite this, you were able to show me a great deal of pupil work across a range of subjects, which gave me strong evidence of the good or better progress

the majority are making, including those from vulnerable groups.

Pupils' attitudes to school are very positive. They told me that they enjoy coming to school because teachers plan exciting things to do and make learning fun. Pupils were confident when answering my questions about what they were learning and why. They were also keen to tell me about their favourite subjects, including the exciting investigations they undertake in science. They were also positive about the wide range of clubs they can attend during and after school.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors acknowledged the many strengths of the school, including the good quality of teaching, leading to pupils achieving well. They acknowledged that pupils worked hard and that their behaviour was good. Inspectors also identified that teachers needed to encourage pupils to move on in their learning as soon as they were ready and to give them more opportunities to explore, investigate and find things out for themselves, especially in science.

Leaders have improved these aspects successfully across all year groups, and directly linked to leaders' expectations of what constitutes good-quality teaching and learning and assessment. Outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics continue to improve year on year and at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 were in line with the national averages.

The majority of parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school's work and hold you and your staff in high regard. They particularly value the supportive, family atmosphere in the school. A comment from one parent typifies the views of others: 'The school has a lovely community atmosphere and the children are known to all staff, helping to create this environment.'

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated lead for safeguarding you have ensured that all arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are effective. You make careful checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils. Several members of staff and governors are trained in safer recruitment. All staff are up to date on safeguarding basic awareness training.

You are proactive in your determination to make the school even more secure. For example, the recent upgrade to electric gates and external doors provides greater security for pupils to enter and leave the school safely.

You and the staff ensure that pupils learn in a supportive, safe and caring environment. Pupils know how to keep safe in the building. They are aware of the potential dangers when using the internet. Knowing the school's rules well, pupils said that if they ever viewed anything on the internet that made them feel unsafe, they would tell an adult. The majority of parents agree that their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection we agreed to focus on the following aspects: the effectiveness of teaching in both phases, children's progress in the early years, the teaching of phonics and leaders' actions to ensure that attendance remains above the national average.
- Last year, pupils' attainment in the early years and key stage 1, in all areas, was slightly above that seen nationally. Pupils' current work shows that standards remain good across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the proportion of pupils attaining at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics remains a concern and further action is needed to address these poorer outcomes.
- In lesson observations, conducted jointly with you, I saw pupils in all classrooms working hard on various activities related to their 'Wellness Day' that incorporated aspects of mathematics, English and topic work. Their books showed that many take pride in their work, presenting it neatly and completing exercises. We also observed pupils relishing challenges presented to them and viewing mistakes as learning opportunities. Pupils worked very well with one another when tackling tricky problems. For example, pupils in Year 6 were prepared to help each other when discussing, sensibly, coping strategies they used when school work tests their resilience and perseverance.
- Children make good progress from their different starting points in the early years. The children in the Nursery and Reception classes benefit from being in calm learning environments. The classrooms and the outdoor area include a wide range of resources. Children are happy, confident learners. They have many opportunities to explore, build and create. One child clearly explained they were learning about how to describe their feelings and gave an example: 'I feel scared when a spider comes towards me.'
- Leaders have swiftly responded to the results of the phonics screening check of 2018, which were below the national average. You rightly see the teaching of phonics as a stepping stone towards developing a passion for reading. You and the staff have made it a priority to provide a range of age-appropriate books that pupils want to read. You also work hard with parents to ensure that they too encourage their children to read as much as possible at home. Pupils' progress in reading is improving strongly.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils enjoy their learning in a wide range of subjects. The emphasis placed on pupils gaining personal experiences engages their interest and deepens their understanding of topics. The wider curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to increase their vocabulary and to develop their writing skills. However, for some pupils, particularly in key stage 2, their writing does not always match the quality of that produced in their English books.
- The last line of enquiry looked at leaders' actions to ensure that attendance remains above the national average. This was because pupil absence has slowly risen over the past three years. Leaders monitor attendance information carefully, follow up any causes for concern and deploy appropriate staff

effectively to support pupils, particularly if circumstances might make their families vulnerable. Current data shows that attendance is above the national average and continues to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide pupils in key stage 1 with greater challenge in reading, writing and mathematics so that more attain at greater depth
- pupils' writing across the curriculum, particularly in key stage 2, matches the quality of that produced in their English books.

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

Yours sincerely

Steven Cartlidge
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you and other leaders. We visited classes together to observe pupils' learning and scrutinised their work. I talked to pupils in lessons and in a meeting, when I listened to their views of the school. I listened to some pupils read in class. A wide range of documentary evidence was scrutinised, including information about pupils' performance, the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and safeguarding documentation. I met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and two other governors. I also met a representative from the local authority. I took account of 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 19 free-text comments, together with those expressed by parents to me at the beginning of the school day.