

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



25 April 2018

Mrs Nicola Tippen
Headteacher
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Lewis Road
Hesters Way
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL51 0HZ

Dear Mrs Tippen

Short inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 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 your school was judged to be good in January 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been considerable changes to staffing, including leadership, since the last inspection. The school has also expanded to include a Nursery. You have a clear vision. This, combined with a strong drive for improvement from leaders at every level, is ensuring that the school is responding positively following a dip in its performance. Week on week, you are making a notable difference to whole-school effectiveness.

You are refining whole-school systems so that they have a positive impact on pupils' well-being and learning. As a result, safeguarding is effective and pupils' behaviour has improved markedly this year. There have been no exclusions so far. Leaders' analysis shows that there are significantly fewer incidents of poor behaviour.

In recent years, pupils' progress and achievement dipped. Leaders' actions to remedy weaknesses in teaching are increasingly successful. As a result, pupils' achievements in writing are improving quickly in many classes. However, this is not yet replicated consistently across the school in reading and mathematics. Teaching in these subjects is too inconsistent over time.

Governors have seen the school through a turbulent time. You value the help you

receive. Governors have been successful in establishing the Nursery this year. It is a well-resourced and inviting setting for children to attend.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to strengthen the skills of teachers to support senior leaders in monitoring pupils' attainment and progress. Current senior leaders have trained up middle leaders. Leaders are taking decisive action to bring about further improvement and increase pupils' progress and achievement. For example, teachers' assessments are now mostly accurate and teachers' expectations are increasing. As a result, most teachers use their assessments to plan work that builds directly on what pupils know, can do and understand.

At that time, you were also asked to ensure that the most able pupils were challenged. In 2017, an increasing proportion of Year 6 pupils exceeded the standards that are expected nationally in reading and mathematics. However, in some classes, current pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable because teaching does not challenge and stretch their thinking well enough.

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. Almost every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, reported that they would recommend it. They are positive about the changes being made. There is a warm 'family feel' in the school because everyone is accepted.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have taken intensive action and have strengthened all aspects of the school's safeguarding practices. As a result, the single central record meets requirements. You have responded promptly to local authority safeguarding audits. Policies, procedures and training relating to safeguarding and are up to date and in line with current legislation. New staff induction is thorough. As a result, staff are able to apply their training quickly to reduce pupils' risk of harm.

The Nursery manager has ensured that all welfare checks are in place and statutory requirements met. Leaders responsible for safeguarding hold regular meetings with family support workers, the attendance officer, and Nursery staff, to ensure that you are doing all you can to reduce pupils' and children's risk of harm. Safeguarding leaders are vigilant in all aspects of their work. You work effectively with external agencies to ensure that everything is being done to safeguard children and minimise risk. Your referrals are timely and consistently followed up.

Inspection findings

- One aspect I reviewed was pupils' attendance. This is because rates of absence had increased rapidly. In 2017, over one fifth of pupils in the school were persistently absent. Your determined work with the attendance officer and parent liaison officer has stemmed the decline. The impact of your work is impressive. In just a few months, you have halved persistent absenteeism in the school. Pupils' attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. However, some pupils still do not attend regularly enough. This limits learning time and restricts

pupils' progress over time.

- I looked at the impact of leaders' actions, including those of governors, to establish whether current pupils' progress is consistently strong. This is because published performance information does not indicate that pupils' progress has been securely good in the recent past. Approximately half of the pupils in the school are eligible for pupil premium funding. Until very recently, governors did not hold leaders to account stringently enough for the impact of pupil premium funding. Very recently, there has been an external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding. Leaders, including governors, have responded quickly to advice. You are making key improvements to the way the funding is used. A detailed action plan is in place. You have strengthened systems to analyse the impact of the funding. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work on raising pupils' achievement in reading and mathematics.
- You are taking decisive action to eradicate the legacy of pupils' underachievement. A review of pupils' workbooks shows that pupils' progress is accelerating this year. The proportion of pupils who have the skills and knowledge expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics is increasing steadily. However, teaching is not yet fully making amends for pupils' previous progress that has been too slow across key stages 1 and 2. Leaders check the impact of teaching. However, their feedback does not clearly communicate the short-term improvements required to accelerate pupils' progress. As a result, pupils' underachievement persists in a few classes.
- I also examined the accuracy of teachers' assessment, particularly in writing. As a result of staff training, systems to check what pupils know, can do and understand are increasingly accurate. Leaders' actions have improved the teaching of writing this year. Consequently, a growing proportion of pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 write with the complexity and accuracy expected for their age. However, pupils' spelling remains a weakness across key stages 1 and 2. This restricts pupils' progress over time.
- I also looked at the impact of the teaching of reading. Pupils' progress and achievement in reading at key stage 2 have been too inconsistent in the past. Too few disadvantaged pupils reach the standards that are expected for their age. There was some improvement to pupils' progress and achievement in 2017. However, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who met the expected standards in reading remains below the national average.
- The teaching of phonics is too inconsistent from class to class. This restricts the progress that pupils make. Some pupils in Year 1, particularly those who are low- and middle-attaining, do not yet demonstrate secure application of some key Year 1 sounds when reading independently. Also, the proportion of boys, and disadvantaged pupils, who met the required standard in the phonics screening check has been too low in the past. Pupils' reading material is not matched well enough to their understanding of phonics.
- The teaching of reading is a core area for improvement. Teachers' assessment systems to evaluate pupils' reading development are inconsistent. Consequently, it is difficult for leaders to have an accurate picture of pupils' progress in reading across the school. You are beginning to adapt the reading curriculum to ensure

that teaching enables pupils to have a good understanding of what they read. However, this work is recent. Current teaching is not yet remedying historical gaps in middle-attaining and the most able pupils' reading skills. Your work to overhaul the wider curriculum is ongoing. Because of this, opportunities for pupils to use and apply their reading skills across a range of subjects are not yet fully utilised.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils apply their phonics skills well to read and spell accurately in key stages 1 and 2 so that pupils who have low and average attainment catch up quickly
- pupils have a good understanding of what they read and more pupils are challenged to reach the high standard
- leaders' checks on teaching and pupils' progress are robust so that pupils' prior underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics is eradicated quickly
- teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve, so that disadvantaged pupils, the middle-attaining pupils and the most able pupils make consistently strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics, including in the early years.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, other school leaders and three governors. I also met with representatives from Gloucestershire local authority and the Catholic Diocese of Clifton. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I talked to pupils to hear about their views of the school. I considered a range of documentary evidence, including: development plans; external reports of the school's effectiveness; school performance information; monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment; and analysis of pupils' attendance, behaviour, and safeguarding documentation. In addition, I took account of eight responses to the Parent View online survey and the free-text messaging service. I gathered the views of staff through discussions during the inspection and I reviewed the online staff survey.