

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



16 May 2018

Mrs Sally Saunders
Headteacher
St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School
Howson Road
Brockley
London
SE4 2BB

Dear Mrs Saunders

Short inspection of St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 April 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have set high expectations for what pupils can achieve. These expectations are based upon your stated purpose: 'to provide a quality education, where high standards are an expectation'. Your strong school ethos is underpinned by the school's faith values, which are closely aligned to an emphasis on British values. One of the strengths of the school is pupils' positive attitudes to learning. They work hard to support each other, are polite, resilient and take pride in their school.

You provide clear direction for the school's future improvement. The majority of parents and carers are very supportive of the school. They recognise that the school is 'academically strong' and that your teachers are 'always available to help pupils'. As a small school, they consider it to be 'a family'. You focus strongly on academic success, as well as opportunities for pupils to participate in a broad range of learning activities. You prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education.

Together with your leaders you have established an effective senior leadership team. Together, you have led effective improvements in teaching and addressed the

aspects for improvement that were identified in the previous inspection. You have identified appropriate priorities to continue to improve the school.

Children in the early years make good progress, given their starting points and capabilities. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6, attainment and progress are above the national averages and have been, over time. Leaders rightly identified, however, that the performance of most-able pupils in the 2017 key stage 2 assessments was below the national average. You put in place a full range of strategies to support these pupils. This includes targeting individual pupils, providing additional support, and ensuring that pupils take greater responsibility for their own learning. Such strategies have been successful in improving pupils' progress, overall. The quality of teaching and learning continues to be a focus for the leadership team in their drive to ensure that classroom practice is consistently of a high quality. You agree that assessment of subjects, other than English and mathematics, is a priority for the school.

Governors have a good understanding of the school. Their range of skills enables them to support school improvement well. For example, the chair of governors organises music experiences and drama productions to support pupils' learning. Another governor, experienced in safeguarding and child protection issues, ensures the school's procedures are robust. Governors use a range of information to challenge school leaders effectively. They ensure that their regular visits to the school enable them to see at first hand the work of school leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and records are robust. All checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school are in place. Staff and governors have a strong understanding of current safeguarding guidance. This includes the Prevent Duty and guidance on female genital mutilation. They take this responsibility seriously and are effective at all levels. Leaders work well with families and external agencies to ensure that pupils receive well-targeted support, as required.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using online technology. Annual internet safety days help pupils and parents understand how to manage risks online. Pupils and parents spoken to agree that the school is a safe place to learn.

Inspection findings

- I looked at the actions leaders are taking to improve the performance of most-able pupils, especially across key stage 2. This is because, in 2017, progress in reading, writing and mathematics for these pupils was below that for other groups.
- Children in the early years are encouraged to practise their speaking skills and to talk in full sentences. Great emphasis is given to extending children's vocabulary so that they make good progress in their early literacy skills. In key stage 1,

teachers develop pupil's writing effectively through an emphasis on vocabulary. Teachers provide work that is well matched to the needs of most-able pupils and is challenging. Teachers use strong questioning to build on pupils' thinking. For example, in Year 6 teachers encouraged pupils to provide evidence from high-quality texts to support their views. As a result, the most able pupils make consistently good progress in their writing. Evidence from pupils' books across the school confirms this in all subjects.

- Year 6 pupils are confident and fluent readers. Most-able pupils choose challenging books, enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about them.
- For the second line of enquiry, we agreed to look at how leaders have addressed the decline in writing outcomes at the end of key stage 2. Leaders have improved writing effectively across the school. In particular, they have emphasised the use of high-quality texts. Their systematic monitoring and evaluation have been effective, especially in the greater breadth of writing produced. For example, Year 2 pupils wrote well when telling a story from a character's point of view. High expectations in the use of challenging vocabulary in Year 4 help pupils to write more exciting paragraphs.
- Teachers consistently emphasise speaking and listening skills to develop vocabulary. This helps all pupils from an early age to improve their writing. Throughout the school, the use of quality texts motivates pupils. For example, Year 6 pupils were highly engaged in studying 'The Highwayman'. Pupils wrote high-quality pieces to describe the main characters, effectively supported by the teacher's good subject knowledge.
- Finally, I looked at how well the school's curriculum meets the needs of all pupils so that they are challenged to improve their knowledge and understanding. Leaders have prioritised the further development of the curriculum. They consulted with pupils to identify what reflected their interests and would motivate them to develop their learning.
- The implementation of whole-school projects enables all pupils to expand their knowledge and understanding across many subjects. Each class chooses the aspect of the project on which to focus. At the end of the project, each class presents to the whole school. This encourages whole-school working, as well as joint work across key stages. It supports progression in learning and helps pupils and staff to understand the expectations for each year group. For example, in the Reception Year, children are keen to share their discoveries of insects as they explore their surroundings. Consequently, they deepen their interests in science as part of the 'Our Environment' topic. Year 1 pupils undertook a project on 'People and Places.' Each pupil presented their work to their peers and was assessed by them. Consequently, pupils strengthened their knowledge, practised a variety of skills and developed their self-confidence. The use of specialist teaching in, for example, music, performing arts and physical education enhances learning for all pupils. School visits and visitors support the school's curriculum well. For example, a visit to the Houses of Parliament by the school council, as part of a democracy teaching unit, gave them a better understanding of the British political system.
- Members of the school council said that they like the new curriculum and enjoy

learning 'something new'. They say that they enjoy the challenges and opportunities that teachers plan for them. This is because they are able to discuss what they are learning and teachers will 'listen to them.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment in the foundation subjects matches that within the core subjects so that all pupils make good progress across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Barnes

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher, and senior and middle leaders. I visited lessons with members of the leadership team and governing body. I held a meeting with members of the governing body and spoke on the telephone with the school's improvement partner. I listened to pupils read and met with members of the school council. I reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, and scrutinised a range of pupils' work and information about pupil progress and attendance. The school's single central record, pre-employment checks and safeguarding procedures were scrutinised. Finally, I considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys, including 18 responses from parents and 13 responses from staff members.