

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Miss Jennifer O'Prey  
Headteacher  
St Dominic's Catholic Primary School  
Southampton Road  
London  
NW5 4JS

Dear Miss O'Prey

### **Short inspection of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on the 3 May 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 May 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 are a consistently effective headteacher and have high aspirations for the school. You are skilled at identifying areas that are in need of further improvement and have put effective approaches in place to address them. The high-quality, bespoke professional development that you have provided for your staff and your ongoing direct involvement in developing teacher practice have established a strong capacity for further improvement.

The governing body knows the school extremely well. Governors are proactive, regularly involved in school life and ambitious for its future. They provide effective challenge for school leaders but also support them to focus on raising standards. For example, you recently appreciated their involvement in the management of improvements to the school premises.

Pupils' behaviour is delightful. They are keen to learn, happy and work cooperatively together. I enjoyed listening to them sing their mission statement, which they are clearly very proud of. Parents are very positive about the school. One parent on the Ofsted free text said, 'this is a wonderful school'. Another appreciated how quickly their child had settled, and others shared the good progress that their children are making.

#### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and the safeguarding leader have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You and your leaders, including governors, understand your roles and

responsibilities well and ensure that procedures are robust. Staff and governors have regular training and, consequently, have a clear understanding of what constitutes effective safeguarding practice. All staff are vigilant, and there is a clear collective responsibility for keeping children safe. Governors are proactive in checking practice and ensuring that all the necessary recruitment checks are carried out on adults prior to employment.

You and the governing body have ensured that the website provides a range of detailed information about child safety to support parents. Pupils are extremely knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe, particularly with regard to online safety. All staff and parents, both in the Ofsted questionnaire and internal school questionnaires, said that they are confident that their children are safe and well cared for. The promotion of British values is intertwined with the school's values and promoted around the school.

### **Inspection Findings**

- For the first line of enquiry, we agreed to look at the extent to which you and your leaders ensure that the very youngest children progress well from their starting points in the early years. This is because the number of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception has been below the national average for the last three years, and attainment in English has been well below the national average.
- Most pupils transfer direct from Nursery to Reception, and robust assessment on entry procedures is used in both classes to ensure that children are well catered for. The early years leader makes effective use of moderation across local schools to ensure that assessments are secure. Children are tracked regularly across the areas of learning, and appropriate interventions are put in place where needed. The early years leader ensures that children's next learning steps are clearly identified and followed up through a structured key-worker system in the Nursery and through weekly team meetings in Reception.
- The allocation of funding to improve the outdoor learning environment has resulted in open, welcoming and high-quality spaces in both Nursery and Reception. I observed adults engaging well with children and using questioning and modelling effectively to develop children's learning further. The children's learning journals evidence a wide range of interesting learning experiences over time. We observed that activities inside the Nursery and Reception classrooms have a clear focus, but we agreed that further work needs to be done to develop the same opportunities for challenge in the outdoor environment.
- The early years leader has a clear vision and detailed action plan for further improvement. She appreciates, and is making effective use of, the professional development opportunities that you have provided, which include visits to outstanding provisions. As a result, pupils make good progress from starting points that are typically very low for their age. In-school performance information and my observations in Reception do indicate, however, that overall the proportion of children attaining a good level of development remains below the national average.

- For the second line of enquiry, we agreed that we would evaluate whether there is sufficient challenge in key stage 2 for the most able pupils in mathematics so that more pupils achieve at the higher standard. The reason for this is that, while pupil progress is very strong, the proportion of pupils working at the higher standard in mathematics has been below the national average for the last two years.
- Leaders have ensured that the school's new mathematics mastery approach is used effectively to support pupils in deepening their understanding of mathematical concepts. Teachers have, accordingly, been successful in increasing challenge for the most able through an increase in mathematical problem-solving and reasoning.
- Although there has been a recent change in the leadership of mathematics, you secured a strong transition from one mathematics leader to another and, as a result, the momentum in improvement has been maintained. The leadership of mathematics is strong. You and your leaders were able to demonstrate clearly where leaders have used their expertise to monitor and support colleagues in further improving practice. As a result, learning tasks are well matched to pupils' different abilities, and there is a consistent, high-quality approach to teaching mathematics across key stage 2.
- Pupils are confident to take risks, and enthusiastically discuss their mathematics with their peers. They explained to me that the school's new approach to pupil feedback is ensuring that misconceptions are addressed quickly, either individually or as a class. Pupils are keen learners in mathematics. They try hard and enjoy being challenged. One pupil who I spoke to said, 'I like it when it's hard, I learn more,' and another said that 'learning is interesting and fun'.
- As a result, the vast majority of pupils make good progress in key stage 2 in mathematics, and a higher-than-average proportion make rapid progress from their starting points at the end of key stage 1. You have been successful in increasing the proportion of pupils achieving at the higher standard. Your current performance information indicates that proportions in each class in key stage 2 are either in line with, or above, other pupils nationally. We did agree that there are some key groups of pupils in the school that are not achieving as well as their peers at the higher standard.
- For the final line of enquiry, we agreed that I would evaluate how effectively you and your leaders are reducing the rate of persistent absence so that it is at least in line with other schools nationally. This is because although overall absence is in line with schools nationally, persistent absence remains above schools nationally.
- You and your deputy make effective use of a range of strategies to highlight the importance of good attendance and reduce persistent absence. These include incentives such as the '100% wristband', and information for parents, such as the half-termly attendance newsletter. You and your deputy make effective use of strategies, such as first-day calling and the use of external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe when not in school.
- Your deputy demonstrated how she carefully monitors the attendance of those who are persistent absentees and meets regularly with parents to ensure that

frequent absence is tackled. She takes time to understand the reason behind the absences and showed me examples of where her support has directly improved persistent absence. Pupils who I spoke to understand the importance of coming to school regularly, and one, rightly, told me that 'it is to help get far in life'.

- When attendance does not improve, you and your leaders make appropriate use of external agencies to bring about improvement. Some cases are complex or multi-faceted and the school has worked with the education welfare service to improve these cases. We agreed that further action needed to be taken to ensure that joint work with external agencies is more effective in reducing the rate of persistent absence.
- As a result of your actions, the persistent absence of some pupils has improved. However, overall the proportion of pupils with persistent absence is similar this year to the previous year and remains above schools nationally. Persistent absence also continues to remain at its highest for some key groups of pupils, including those that are disadvantaged. You recognise that further work needs to be done to improve the attendance for these groups.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- learning opportunities in the early years, particularly outdoors, are challenging and engaging in order to increase children's progress
- the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in mathematics is consistent across all groups of pupils and similar to the national average
- attendance continues to improve for all groups of pupils, including those that are disadvantaged so that a higher proportion of pupils attend school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely  
Helen Morrison

**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and your deputy headteacher. I met with two governors and a representative from the local authority. I considered the views of parents, pupils and staff, including written comments made to Ofsted. You and your deputy accompanied me on visits to classrooms in the early years and in key stage 2. I looked at pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning. I also evaluated a range of school documentation, including school development plans, safeguarding records and information about current pupils' achievement and attendance.