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Mrs Mairead Waugh
Headteacher
St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School
Woods Avenue
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Hertfordshire
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Dear Mrs Waugh

Short inspection of St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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 November 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 have managed the expansion of the school effectively. You have taken opportunities presented by the reorganisation of classes in order to improve the progress and outcomes for pupils, especially in key stage 1.

There are now more pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the school, and there has also been a sharp rise in the number of pupils whose first language is not English. You have ensured that the support available to these groups of pupils is strong. As a result, their needs are well met and they often make progress which is above, and sometimes well above, the national average.

Your decision to introduce phase leaders in September 2017 has proved a most effective strategy. They have successfully promoted high standards in teaching, learning and assessment, supported the moderation of pupils' progress and managed the day-to-day running of their phase of the school.

Parents are hugely supportive of the school, appreciating the high priority which all staff and leaders give to the welfare and personal development of pupils. I spoke informally to parents and carers in the playground and I also examined the views of those who responded to Ofsted's online text questionnaire. Typical comments included, 'Inclusion is remarkable, my child has been given every possible support and encouragement,' and, 'The staff are all so friendly and helpful, my child's

progress has been amazing.'

St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School has many strengths, including the vibrant provision for children in the Nursery and Reception classes, the teaching of music and French led by a highly effective specialist teacher, and the personal development and welfare of pupils. Attendance is extremely high; pupils rarely miss a day at school.

Governors ensure that they understand the needs, strengths and priorities of the school well. They have a well-founded vision for the school to become outstanding, and they understand the next steps the school needs to take in order to realise this ambition. Governors ask appropriately challenging questions of senior leaders. They also fully support your drive to bring about further improvements to pupils' progress and outcomes, especially in mathematics.

You are also ambitious for the school to continue to improve, and you have plans to build upon recent advances. You accept that information from national assessments at the end of key stage 2 shows that there is scope for more pupils, particularly those with middle and higher abilities, to make stronger progress in mathematics. You are rightly keen that more pupils should achieve the higher standard in mathematics by the time they leave the school. You are also aware of the need to ensure that work planned for pupils across the wider curriculum offers a greater variety of challenge and expectation, in order to meet pupils' needs more fully.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are well organised, securely maintained and fit for purpose. Records of adults' suitability to work with children are clear and comprehensive, as are the records of contractors working on the school site. The designated safeguarding governor carries out monitoring activities to ensure that systems are robust. Teachers and support staff understand their role in keeping pupils safe at school, and they understand how to report any concerns. You and your two assistant headteachers, who are also designated safeguarding leaders, liaise effectively with other agencies, ensuring that concerns are followed up quickly. When the need arises, you seek advice in a timely manner from specialist child protection advisers. The pupils I spoke to informally around the school told me that they feel safe and happy at school. Parents confirm that pupils are well looked after and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- In order to ascertain whether the school remained good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. One of these was about the steps leaders are taking to improve pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2, especially for the most able pupils. In the 2016 and the 2017 key stage 2 mathematics tests, pupils' performance indicated that they had made broadly similar progress in these subjects to pupils nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving at the higher standard in 2017 was below the national average in mathematics.

- In September 2017, as a result of your analysis of the most recent key stage 2 test results, you joined the local authority's mathematics project. This has enabled you to improve the structure of mathematics lessons, and raised expectations about the level of challenge given to pupils. This work, together with the steps you have taken to improve the intervention activities for pupils who are at risk of falling behind, is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- When we visited classrooms, we saw many good examples of the new strategies being employed. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils were responding well to the challenges of exploring the properties of quadrilaterals. The teacher's effective use of questioning, coupled with a focus on mathematical discussions and the use of appropriately challenging tasks for pupils of different abilities, allowed all pupils to learn deeply. I asked you to continue securing and refining these improvements, in order that more pupils make good progress over time and a greater proportion achieve at the higher standard in formal assessments.
- My next line of enquiry was about the quality of provision in the early years. Recent assessments have shown that, at the end of Reception, children are achieving in line with their peers nationally. This appeared at odds with your own analysis, in which you grade the early years as outstanding.
- Upon closer analysis, it was clear that the progress children are making in the early years is at least good, and many children make progress in excess of what is generally expected. A high proportion of children enter Nursery and Reception with skills and abilities which are lower than those typically seen. There has been a large increase in children starting at St Philip Howard who are at the earliest stages of speaking English, together with a high percentage of children with other speech and language needs. Teachers and other adults quickly identify these needs and provide a good range of effective strategies which help children make progress quickly.
- In addition, the highly stimulating classrooms, with their focus on promoting children's language, and the beautifully appointed and extremely well-resourced outdoor area, are used to good effect. Leaders manage the early years provision extremely well, ensuring that assessments are carried out continually and accurately, and that additional support is given in a timely manner when children need it.
- My final line of enquiry was about the quality of pupils' work across the wider curriculum. Subject leaders, who are responsible for areas other than English and mathematics, make a positive contribution to learning. This is especially true in subjects such as music and French, where the specialist teacher ensures that pupils are extremely well prepared for the demands of these subjects in the next stage of their education. In one lesson, Year 3 pupils were highly engaged in a lesson which required them to blend French conversation with singing, in order to reinforce their new vocabulary.
- The wider, 'creative' curriculum is carefully planned, and includes some lovely 'wow moments', designed to stimulate pupils' curiosity and promote their enjoyment of learning. This includes activities such as theme days and a recent visit to a local supermarket, planned by some pupils themselves, to buy ingredients. They then returned to school to bake their own cakes.

- Nevertheless, when we looked in pupils' topic books together, it was clear that not all teachers share the same high expectations about what pupils of different abilities can achieve. You agreed with me that there is scope to increase the level of challenge offered to pupils with different abilities, in order to ensure that everyone makes as much progress as possible. I asked you to make this one of your priorities in your plans to continue improving the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements to the teaching of mathematics are secured, so that more pupils make good progress and a greater percentage achieve at the higher standard
- the quality of work produced across the wider curriculum is more challenging and more closely tailored to the needs of pupils of different abilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicholas Rudman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your assistant headteachers to discuss the school's priorities for development, and the impact of actions taken since the previous inspection. I met the leaders who have responsibility for mathematics, music, French, history and geography. In addition, I met with five governors, including the chair, and I spoke on the telephone to a representative from the local authority's commissioned school improvement service. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's self-evaluation document, plans and records for the use of additional funding, and the school's assessment information. I checked the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with pupils, and information relating to attendance. I undertook joint observations of learning across the school, looked at work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I analysed the 87 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the 41 free-text questionnaire responses from parents. I analysed the responses from 35 staff and 158 pupils giving their views of the school.