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12 December 2016

Mrs Jane Lewin
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Lewin

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Wingate

Following my visit to the school on 17 November 2016, 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 April 2013.

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 worked successfully to strengthen the quality of teaching and have improved outcomes for your disadvantaged pupils, which were identified as areas to improve in your previous inspection. In addition, you have improved the progress that pupils make in reading and mathematics and ensured that pupils leave the school with a good grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar skills.

Your pupils feel safe and secure at school because of the warm and caring atmosphere that you and your staff create. Older pupils set a good example to their younger peers through the work they do to organise play activities and the leadership they provide through the school council. Consequently, pupils enjoy coming to school and look forward to the varied and rich topics that your curriculum provides.

As a small school, your teachers know each pupil very well and adapt their teaching skilfully to meet pupils' individual needs. This is exemplified by the good work you do to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Thorough planning, in consultation with parents, has ensured that pupils' needs are well met, allowing them to thrive and make good progress from their starting points. It was also noticeable how kind and caring pupils are to one another. One child said, 'This school is like one big family.'

You have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and clear plans in place to improve the school further. You know there is more to do to develop the leadership role of subject leaders and you have identified improvements to make in the teaching of writing and mathematics. You make regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning and astutely identify aspects of teachers' practice that need to improve. Hence, the school is well placed to sustain the improvements it has made since the last inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

All members of staff are well trained and understand their safeguarding and child protection responsibilities. You take appropriate steps to ensure that rigorous vetting procedures are followed for all adults that work in the school. You also act quickly and decisively to protect children when necessary. You told me that the support you receive from the local authority has improved, which is helping you and other professionals to coordinate support more effectively and resolve concerns more quickly. Parents and members of staff feel that the school is a safe and secure place.

Inspection findings

- The leadership you provide is much appreciated by all members of staff. Everyone is proud of the progress the school has made. Staff appreciate the feedback they receive about their performance and the training and development opportunities you provide. They benefit from working in partnership with colleagues at the federated school, St Godric's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary, and through the wider links with other schools and networks.
- The governing body is very active and involved in the life of the school. Governors are very supportive, but balance this well by regularly holding you to account for the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils in each class. They make focused visits to see for themselves whether the objectives set in the school improvement plan are being achieved. Governors ensure that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and promote sport is carefully audited and has a positive impact.
- Children make good progress in the Reception class from starting points that are typically below the expected level of development. They learn well because teaching explicitly focuses on developing their language and communication skills, and lays solid foundations to support their reading, writing and number skills. Teachers use good questioning to continually probe and extend children's understanding. By the end of the Reception Year, most children attain a good level of development.
- Pupils continue to make good progress across Years 1 and 2. Effective teaching of phonics ensures that pupils quickly learn the sounds letters make. Almost all children reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Both the least able and most able readers make strong progress because they regularly receive the specific help they need and are provided with books that are appropriate for their level of development.

- Pupils make significantly better progress in reading and mathematics across key stage 2 than that seen nationally. Progress in writing is a little weaker. By the end of the key stage, the proportion of pupils working at the expected level is close to or above the national average. However, teaching for the most able pupils, particularly of mathematics, is not sufficiently challenging to increase the proportion attaining a higher level. You recognise that further staff training is required to ensure that all teachers have the necessary skills to promote a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.
- As a small school, you take a highly personalised approach and review the progress of each pupil on a termly basis. If their progress is less than expected, you provide good additional one-to-one or small-group support and check to see if they catch up quickly.
- The well-designed curriculum helps pupils to understand and respect one another's rights. One parent stated, 'Members of staff help my child to develop the skills and morals to become a well-rounded adult'. Mixed-age 'family groups' of pupils have good opportunities across the year to debate and discuss topical issues. These debates and discussions support the mutually respectful and supportive climate engendered in the school. Weekly opportunities to reflect on 'statements to live by' further foster the moral and spiritual dimensions of pupils' personal development.
- All pupils have the opportunity to take part in competitive sport. The majority of the sports premium is used to access specialist sports teachers who are helping the school's staff to develop their coaching skills. As a result, pupils are making more rapid progress in sports and levels of participation in a number of sporting activities has increased.
- The school's work to promote an awareness of diversity has been effective. Visits to different places of worship, including a mosque and a synagogue, took place last year. In addition, a project on Islam delivered by a visiting Islamic group has helped to broaden pupils' understanding and prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' behaviour and conduct, both in lessons and at social times, is excellent. They are very respectful of their teacher and of one another. Older pupils act as good role models through their various leadership activities and the care that they show towards younger pupils. Most pupils are keen to come to school and attend well, although a small number of pupils continue to miss school regularly. You have taken steps to remind parents of the importance of good attendance, although you recognise that continued efforts are required to improve this position in the longer term.

Next steps for the school

Senior leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the role of subject leaders is further enhanced so that they play a more significant part in developing the quality of teaching of writing and mathematics
- teaching challenges the most able pupils effectively so that they make rapid progress and attain the higher level, especially in mathematics, by the end of key stage 2

- the proportion of pupils who miss school regularly continues to reduce.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and the director of children's services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I pursued the following lines of enquiry:

- Are pupils currently in the school making good progress across a range of subjects and key stages?
- Are children in the Reception class making enough progress? Is the curriculum doing enough to address gaps in their knowledge on entry to the school?
- Are leaders taking effective action to improve attendance, particularly the attendance of pupils that miss school regularly?
- Is the quality of teaching and learning good enough, particularly in key stage 1?
- How well are leaders and governors checking and evaluating the work of the school?
- Are child protection and safeguarding arrangements robust and does a culture of vigilance exist across all members of staff?

During the inspection, I met with you, a group of teachers and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I listened to pupils read and spoke with them formally and informally during social times and in lessons. I spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone. You and I jointly observed teaching in each class. I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice and we discussed case studies of vulnerable pupils. I also considered other school information and documentation including the school's improvement plans and self-evaluation statements and attendance information. I examined policies and information posted on the school website. I scrutinised in detail the work in books of some disadvantaged and most-able pupils. I also took the views of parents, pupils and staff into account from their responses to questionnaires.