

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



5 February 2016

Mrs Paula Strachan
Headteacher
St Teresa's RC Primary School
Harris Street
Darlington
County Durham
DL1 4NL

Dear Mrs Strachan

Short inspection of St Teresa's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 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 January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment in September 2015 you have promptly identified the strengths and key priorities for improvement in the school. Governors identify that they wanted you to 'hit the ground running' and this you have certainly achieved. At the same time you have very effectively communicated your aims and vision for the school to other staff and leaders. This has taken the staff with you on your school's journey of further improvement and there are high levels of staff satisfaction with the direction of travel. Leadership capacity across the school has improved. School leaders are now clearer about the expectations of their roles and better skilled through training. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and is well placed to drive further improvement.

There is a welcoming, friendly and inclusive school ethos. All in the school have high expectations for pupils' academic and personal development. Pupils respond well to this, they work hard and are proud of their achievements. They can readily identify how teachers and staff support them with their learning. Pupils' achievements are celebrated through the quality displays around the school which reflect learning in all subjects. Good systems of support are in place to nurture and meet pupils' social and emotional needs. Pupils feel safe, are supportive of one another and socialise well during playtimes.

The school has successfully tackled the area identified for improvement at the previous inspection. Mathematics attainment and progress by the end of Year 6 have been above the national average for the last three years. Observations in mathematics lessons during the inspection showed pupils well engaged with learning and keen to explain their achievements in mathematics. The school's strengths identified at the last inspection in relation to providing 'an atmosphere of calm and harmony' and 'caring relationships' have been well maintained.

You, and your staff, have a clear focus on improving pupils' achievement in writing. A range of approaches has been introduced in order to address this area, including looking for best practice beyond your school. Developing the quality of early years provision to ensure children make a good start to their education is your other key priority. To assist with this you have commissioned the services of an early years specialist leader in education (SLE).

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding policy and practice are regularly reviewed to ensure that processes are secure and best practice is maintained. Rigorous checks are carried out for all staff, governors and volunteers. School leaders respond swiftly to all safeguarding issues. All staff have recently had training about keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Pupils are taught effectively about how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and know who they can talk to if they ever have concerns. Pupils say that there are no incidents of bullying in their school. The school's records show that incidents of misbehaviour and bullying are very rare and that these are quickly addressed by the staff. Parents and staff agree that pupils' behaviour at the school is good.

Inspection findings

- Leadership capacity across the school has improved. You have reviewed the teachers' leadership responsibilities and put in place professional development to enhance leaders' skills. Middle leaders for English, mathematics and of provision for pupils with special educational needs have benefited from leadership training by your school improvement partner and education development advisers. This has developed their skills in leading improvement in their areas of responsibility.
- You have re-established the use of performance management systems to ensure a climate of continuous improvement for leadership and the quality of teaching. Relevant professional development is in place for staff and there are now effective systems for checking on teaching to make sure that its quality is maintained at a consistently good level. Opportunities to seek effective practice beyond your school have been taken. As a result, staff have returned with useful

approaches to address some of your key improvement priorities in writing, attendance and early years. You are developing new systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress and achievement in line with the new National Curriculum. Currently, staff and leaders are developing their understanding of these systems and you know there is still more work to be done. Already there is evidence that these approaches are supporting staff to match their teaching better to pupils' learning. Pupils also have a good understanding of how this is helping them to improve their work. For example, the group of pupils I met during the inspection could clearly explain how 'hot and cold' writing activities had improved the quality of their writing, including grammar, punctuation and spelling.

- Provision for children in the Reception class has improved due to your well-focused actions and the support of the early years SLE. Key improvements are evident in the quality of the learning environment, planning for learning and staff roles and responsibilities. The staff working in this area appreciate these changes and have responded very positively to the improvements. The opportunity for an early years practitioner to visit an outstanding early years provision has enhanced staff skills. During the inspection children were very well engaged in a wide range of learning opportunities both indoors and outdoors. You have rightly identified that the next step will be to develop this practice to include the Nursery class.
- Achievement in reading and phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is a strength of the school. By the end of Year 6, pupils' mathematics attainment has been above the national average for the last three years and their progress has been at least in line with national averages and often significantly higher. Writing achievement has been more variable. The school has made this a priority for development. There is already some evidence in pupils' work that the school is addressing gaps in learning.
- The school's new website was missing some key documents at the beginning of the inspection. However, these documents were available in school and uploaded on the inspection day. Leaders and governors need to ensure that the website continues to meet the statutory guidance.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times is very good. They work hard and are keen to share their learning with adults. The standards of presentation of work in books and displays around the school demonstrate the pride pupils show in their work and the high levels of expectations from staff.
- Overall attendance levels remain stubbornly below the national average despite the determined work of school leaders and staff to improve it. The school has used a wide range of innovative approaches to address this issue. You continue to look for effective practice to address this area and have recently introduced further approaches following your visit to a school in a similar context to your own.
- The governing body has an understanding of the school's overall priorities and is very supportive of the school. However, the level of strategic challenge by governors in the past has been limited. Recent developments, such as the reorganisation of the committee structure and improved understanding of school

data, have improved governors' awareness of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. A clear plan is in place to sharpen governors' strategic skills. This includes a review of governance by a national leader of governance and guidance from the local authority and the Newcastle and Hexham Diocese.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- governors further develop their school improvement monitoring skills in order to provide an improved level of strategic challenge to the school's leaders
- the improved quality of provision created in the Reception class is now used throughout early years, including the Nursery class.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Newcastle and Hexham, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection I discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and the middle leaders who have responsibility for English, mathematics and the provision for pupils with special educational needs. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community and looked at responses to parent questionnaires. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held discussions with your school improvement partner from Durham local authority, the early years specialist leader and two governors who were able to provide me with additional information. I also took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. Alongside you and your deputy headteacher, I visited five classrooms to observe teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work to consider the progress pupils make.