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Miss Tess McNamara
Headteacher
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Augusta Place
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Dear Miss McNamara

Short inspection of St Peter's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since the previous inspection, there have been some significant changes, including your appointment as headteacher in September 2014. Most teachers in post joined the school in September 2015. In a very short time, you have created a united team that shares your ambition for high-quality education. As a result, the school is moving forwards rapidly under your leadership. You have a clear vision and you are supported by an effective leadership team and knowledgeable governing body. You have established a culture where only the best is good enough. High expectations are the order of the day. Pupils and parents talk positively about the new school uniform and the sense of pride in wearing it. You have improved systems and procedures in a short space of time and parents and pupils have noted the change in culture. The large majority are overwhelmingly positive about these changes. As one parent put it, 'the new headteacher is like a breath of fresh air'.

Over the past five years, teaching has remained good and pupils have continued to make good progress. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have been consistently in line with the national average in all subjects, while standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have been well above average in reading and mathematics. While pupils make good progress in reading and outstanding progress in mathematics, achievement in writing has lagged behind. This is because some of the basic skills in

grammar, punctuation and spelling are not addressed early enough. You have recognised that writing is an area for development and have taken action to provide training for staff and introduced a more creative curriculum that allows pupils to write for a real purpose.

At the previous inspection, inspectors commented very favourably on pupils' behaviour and the extent to which pupils feel safe. These continue to be areas of strength within the school. During the inspection, pupils were polite and helpful and conducted themselves well in lessons and around school. Pupils said that they feel safe because they are taught to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Most parents agree that their children are happy, safe and well looked after. Attendance and the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continue to be strongly promoted. Attendance remains above average and pupils show tolerance, respect and appreciation of others, including pupils from other countries who join the school.

Some attention has been paid to improving pupils' writing in response to the previous issues. This includes revisiting the handwriting policy so that younger pupils use flicks when learning letter formation in order to develop a cursive and joined handwriting style. Due attention has also been given to the quality and quantity of writing produced, and pupils are able to write at greater length using sophisticated prose with good attention to grammar and punctuation. Spelling strategies are, however, less well embedded. This is because teachers do not pay enough attention to the link between early reading and writing. For example, phonics prompts are not displayed in early years or Key Stage 1, so pupils do not have any visual clues to help with their spelling. Additionally, older pupils lack strategies to spell difficult words such as 'schedule'. You agree that further work is needed to improve this aspect.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Systems in place are established and effective. Staff are fully trained and they know precisely what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's well-being. As the designated leader, you are aware of the procedures required to record and refer wider concerns to external agencies so that further action is taken if needed. You and the governors ensure that safer recruitment procedures for staff are meticulously followed and the relevant checks are fully carried out.

The most recent guidance on keeping children safe in education has been incorporated into the school's policy and has been shared with staff and governors. Risk assessments are routinely carried out for school activities and trips to take account of any areas of danger. Appropriate checks are also made of the school site by staff and governors to ensure that the premises are safe for adults and pupils. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- Your dynamic and enthusiastic leadership sets the tone for exciting teaching. Pupils say, 'lessons are more exciting; not just filling in sheets'. The curriculum has been redesigned to ensure that writing, a key priority for the school, allows pupils to write for a real purpose. When we visited classrooms, pupils in Years 5 and 6 were highly engaged in writing persuasive letters for a fund-raising event. The recent death of Henry Worsley, explorer, was skilfully used as a stimulus to encourage pupils to present an argument that advocated continuing to raise money for Worsley's chosen charity. Pupils produced high-quality writing and used emotional language to achieve their goal.
- You have very quickly identified where improvements are needed and have set about introducing and tightening systems to make sure these are achieved. For example, teachers are set challenging targets which link to whole-school priorities and the teachers' standards. Parents report that communication is much improved and they welcome the valuable information and pupil targets provided at parents' evening. Governors also feel well informed as you provide them with clear and honest updates. Action plans provide the fine detail of steps being taken to improve the areas identified. However, these plans are not always time-framed, evaluated routinely, or with any measureable milestones. As a result, leaders and governors are unable to check which actions are having the greatest impact.
- With your staff, you track the progress of individual pupils and different groups. Your current assessment data show that there are no gaps between boys and girls in any subject, or between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. This is also the case for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. They do equally as well as their peers. This is because teaching assistants have been trained to deliver intervention programmes and teachers plan lessons which meet their needs. However, we noted in books and during our visits to classrooms that the level of challenge is not always sufficient for the most-able pupils and that pupils are not moved on soon enough in their learning when they demonstrate that they know and can do the work set.
- Your senior leadership team makes a strong contribution to school improvement. They support the newly qualified members of staff and share training and ideas to raise the quality of teaching. They are increasingly involved in checking pupils' work, observing teaching and talking to pupils about their learning. They have developed detailed action plans and have already made changes to areas they are responsible for. For example, exciting topics such as this term's 'Discovery' topic have provided an exciting stimulus for teachers and pupils to develop investigative, problem-solving and exploration skills. Identification of, and provision for, pupils with special educational needs have also been improved. A provision map has been compiled to show the type of support pupils receive and how often. Careful records are kept and pupils' progress is carefully measured. As a result, pupils' needs are fully met and they achieve as well as others in the school.

- Governors have a realistic and accurate view of the school. They are very supportive and work closely with you and your leadership team. They visit school regularly and meet with you and other staff to gather information for themselves as to how things are running. They managed the change of headteacher process effectively and ensured that all staff appointments made adhered fully to safer recruitment procedures. They have a good understanding of data and how well the school is performing compared with other schools nationally. They ask challenging questions and remain aspirational for the school.
- Teaching has remained good because you have made some good appointments and provided good-quality training and guidance for staff, including teaching assistants. Those who are newly qualified receive good support from experienced staff and as a result, they are quickly developing the skills needed to maintain high standards. During our visits to classrooms, we also observed high levels of pupil engagement and good relationships between staff and pupils. Teaching time is maximised and used to good effect. For example, pupils in Year 3 returning from swimming were provided with an interesting and challenging mathematics investigation to fill the short gap before lunchtime. Within seconds of settling, pupils were engrossed and keen to solve the conundrum posed.
- Good attention is paid to setting tasks at the right level for pupils of different abilities, and effective support is provided for those who are at risk of falling behind. Teachers in the early years and Key Stage 1 provide a wide range of experiences and opportunities to extend pupils' knowledge and skills effectively. However, teachers do not always ensure that basic skills, such as counting to 10, and correct letter and number formation are totally secure before moving pupils on to other concepts, such as using adjectives, or adding and subtracting numbers beyond 10. As a result, some pupils carry errors forward and acquire bad habits.
- The school's marking policy is applied consistently across the school. Teachers provide helpful feedback and guidance so that pupils know how to improve their work. Pupils are very clear about the criteria used, and older pupils respond to comments made.
- Pupils enjoy school and this is shown in their high levels of attendance. As one pupil summed it up, 'I feel at home here'. Pupils behave well and older pupils readily take on additional responsibilities such as looking after younger pupils. We saw pupils demonstrating good levels of concentration and perseverance in their work when we visited classrooms. Pupils have a good understanding of British values as you ensure that these are closely aligned to teaching about Catholic values and virtues. Pupils know what 'democracy' and 'individual liberty' mean. Examples of work you provided also show that pupils are taught to value their education, for example by learning about Malala Yousafzai, the youngest ever Nobel Prize laureate. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the clubs, visits and visitors that enrich the curriculum. Many pupils said the most exciting event this term so far has been the visit of a zoologist and learning about the different animals he brought.

- A key focus of the inspection was to check on the achievement of children in the early years. This was because in 2013 and 2014, not enough children reached a good level of development and so were not well prepared for Key Stage 1. However, improvements made to the learning environment, together with whole-school improvements in terms of provision for children with special educational needs, staff training and developing imaginative teaching strategies, have ensured that children make good progress. As a result, most children in 2015 reached a good level of development that is well above the national average. Parents report that their children settle quickly in Reception class. Improved assessment systems are in place to record and capture examples of children's achievements. You have taken steps to involve parents more in their children's learning by making these assessments available electronically so that parents can also add information about their child's progress at home. Your own and other standardised assessment information shows that most children join the school with skills and knowledge that are typical or above for their age.
- The local authority provides light-touch support as it recognises that leadership is effective. It knows how well the school is doing and provides guidance as needed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- basic skills are taught well and sequentially in early years and Key Stage 1 so that common errors are eradicated as pupils move through the school
- teaching challenges the most-able pupils by moving pupils on when they show they are ready
- teachers provide strategies that enable pupils to spell more accurately in order to improve their writing and accelerate their progress
- action plans set out clear and measurable criteria so that leaders and governors can check the impact of actions they are taking.

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your leadership team and members of the governing body. I spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone. I visited all the classrooms with you and spoke to pupils about their learning. We looked at the work in their books. I spoke informally to parents as they brought their children to school and took account of the 47 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Documents and records relating to pupils' achievement, teaching, leadership, attendance and safeguarding were scrutinised.