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Mrs Elizabeth Housden
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Dear Mrs Housden

Short inspection of St Finian's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 November 2011.

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, you have continued to steer the school successfully on its journey of improvement. Pupils and staff are central to the work that you lead. You ensure that leaders are focused on 'bringing out the best in people'. You know your school well and work effectively with your acting deputy headteacher to maintain high standards through a period of great change. Your staff are committed to helping every child to be happy and successful, and to prepare them well for life beyond St Finian's.

Your school has a strongly supportive and inclusive culture. Pupils are kind and friendly to each other and respectful of the adults who help them. Pupils behave well in lessons and when playing together at lunchtime and playtime. They have a growing understanding of their role as good citizens in Britain. Pupils are encouraged effectively to respect and learn about people who are different from them, for example through the multifaith week activities taking place at the time of the inspection. Leaders and teachers have high expectations for what pupils can achieve and work hard to help these expectations to be realised. Pupils reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are securely above the national average by the end of key stage 2, making good progress from when they arrive in the Reception class.

Since the last inspection in 2011, the school has changed significantly and is now established in its new building, which helps staff to provide a stimulating learning environment for pupils. Wider leadership has strengthened, and although recent staff changes have reduced capacity in the short term, you are working with staff to rebuild and keep moving forward. Staff and governors work together to share and develop the strategic vision of the school so that everyone can contribute to how the school becomes even better. Established teachers coach less experienced staff effectively to ensure that pupils are taught equally well across the school and make good progress as a result. You are supported well by your acting deputy headteacher, who works closely with you to hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes.

You recognise that recent change has been unsettling and has slowed the pace of the school's improvement journey temporarily, but remain determined to keep driving standards forward. You have taken steps to reassure parents through improved communication and opportunities for them to work in partnership with the school, but a minority still identify this as a concern. You understand that although pupils ending key stage 2 in 2016 achieved well, their progress was not good enough, especially in writing and for middle-ability pupils. You acknowledge that, while individual pupils' progress is monitored closely, leaders and governors have not recently tracked the progress of groups as carefully as they could.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders place great importance on looking after the pupils in their care and keeping them safe. As one parent stated, 'St Finian's values each pupil and focuses on harnessing and encouraging the positive in every child'. Pupils report that they feel safe and trust adults to help them with any difficulties they may have.

All staff understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and carry them out with diligence, knowing each pupil's individual needs. They receive regular and relevant training to help them in their role. Leaders make careful checks on all adults who come into school and keep appropriate records. They work effectively with experts from outside the school to provide support for pupils and families who need it because their circumstances make them vulnerable.

Inspection findings

- Leaders know the school's strengths and work tirelessly with staff to tackle the areas which could be even better. They are managing carefully a significant change in staffing over the past year which has redirected leaders' priorities and reduced the pace of school improvement in the short term. Leaders recognise the importance of supporting new staff to maintain the quality of provision before they can move forward again more rapidly.
- Leaders encourage all staff and governors to be involved in the strategic direction of the school, so that the vision for the school is shared effectively. This gives staff ownership and helps everyone to work closely and supportively for the benefit of the pupils.

- Governors are clear about their role and ask challenging questions to check their understanding of what leaders tell them. They make good use of training opportunities which increase their strategic effectiveness. They work creatively to recruit new members with appropriate skills.
- The local authority provides useful challenge and support that keep leaders focused and hold them to account. You and your governors make good use of training that supports the school's work and develops staff skills further. This helps to maintain the quality of provision.
- Most parents have confidence in the school, appreciating particularly the nurture and care that staff provide for their children. A minority do not feel that leaders respond well to their concerns or keep them informed about their children's progress. Leaders know this and have increased opportunities for parents to come into school and see their children's work and talk to staff. Leaders recognise that there is further work to be done in securing the confidence of some parents.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is good. Leaders evaluate accurately the strengths and areas for improvement in lessons that they visit and support staff appropriately in developing their skills. As a result, pupils enjoy a consistent approach to their work, based on high expectations and a love of learning.
- Pupils develop their skills as well as their knowledge and understand the steps in their learning journey. Pupils' needs are catered for well, with additional adults working effectively with pupils who need extra help.
- Pupils attend school regularly, with few being persistently absent. Leaders monitor attendance carefully and act swiftly if pupils are away from school, to check that they are safe and encourage their prompt return.
- Pupils produce high-quality work across a range of subjects, showing increasing sophistication and technical mastery. This supports leaders' assertions that pupils make good progress over time. They read with comprehension and perseverance, using their skills to decode unfamiliar words when text is sometimes quite difficult for them.
- Teachers assess pupils' learning carefully and consistently, and identify specific next steps each child needs to take in order to make better progress. Leaders meet class teachers regularly to review these assessments and challenge teachers to act further where progress is not as good as it could be.
- Although leaders know very well how individual pupils are doing, they do not look as sharply at the progress of different groups of learners, making it harder for them to identify strategically where further support might best be directed. This is reducing the effectiveness with which teachers work to help key groups of pupils to catch up with their peers.
- In 2016, more pupils made at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 than was the case nationally. Conversely, at key stage 2, pupils' progress across these three subjects was below expectations, although higher proportions of them achieved the expected standard than was typical nationally. Leaders have addressed the reasons behind this, and pupils currently in the school are on track to make better progress by

the end of key stage 2.

- By the end of key stage 1, boys and girls achieved similarly, and disadvantaged pupils did better than their peers in school. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities did not perform as well as their peers, and in response leaders are improving provision for this group of pupils with vigour.
- Current work and progress information show that pupils are typically on track to make good progress in most year groups, particularly in mathematics, but progress is less strong in writing and for pupils in Year 3 and Year 4.
- The most able pupils make better progress than their middle-ability peers in school, and leaders are currently focusing on raising expectations for all so that rates of progress become more consistently high and a greater proportion of pupils make better than expected progress.
- Staff in the early years foundation stage evaluate accurately the quality of provision and work effectively together to improve it further. They take prompt and decisive action in areas they identify as needing to get better.
- In 2015, the proportion of boys achieving a good level of development by the end of the foundation stage was very low. Leaders took decisive action and consequently results in 2016 improved significantly, not just for boys but across the year group. Steps are in place to accelerate boys' progress even more, so that they achieve as well as girls.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they look carefully at how different groups of pupils are achieving so that leaders can act strategically to meet their needs
- middle-ability pupils make greater progress by the end of key stage 2 so that more pupils overall make better than expected progress
- they continue to develop opportunities to share the school's work with parents so that the minority who express reservations gain confidence in leaders' work.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We visited all classes together to watch pupils working, talk to them and look at their work. I met with you and your acting deputy headteacher, other staff, governors, pupils and your school improvement partner. I talked to parents informally at the end of the school day and considered 50 responses to the Parent View questionnaire, 48 free text comments and two email comments from parents. I considered a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, information on pupils' attendance and progress, governors' records, the school website and various policies. I listened to two pupils reading and observed playtime on the playground. I reviewed the school's safeguarding procedures, including records of recruitment checks.

During the inspection, I focused on:

- how well leaders and governors meet the needs of different groups of pupils
- whether teaching, especially at key stage 2, helps pupils make good progress
- how well the culture of safeguarding cares for pupils and keeps them safe
- whether some pupils are on track to make better progress than in the past
- how well early years provision helps pupils, especially boys, prepare for their key stage 1 learning.