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Mrs Michelle Bernadette Ryan
Headteacher
Saint Gabriel's Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Ryan

Short inspection of Saint Gabriel's Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2017, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2010.

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 established an ethos of high expectations and a shared commitment to ongoing improvement. You have addressed the need to strengthen leadership and the quality of teaching. This process initially brought some challenges and a degree of staffing turbulence that contributed to a dip in outcomes in 2014. However, you and your governing body resolutely pursued the need to raise standards and expectations and your actions have been reflected in the strong and improving outcomes evident in both 2015 and 2016. You have developed a positive and well-motivated staff team who are actively involved in professional development and networking activities to strengthen expertise and improve provision for pupils. As a result of good leadership and effective teaching, pupils make good and improving progress.

You and your team demonstrate a commitment to the wider personal needs of pupils. The religious ethos of the school informs much of your work and pupils are able to discuss how core values help them in building positive and respectful relationships with one another and adults. You have provided a broad and balanced curriculum that is becoming increasingly enriched by more ambitious use of outdoor spaces and which is complemented by a strong extra-curricular offer, including dance, gardening, music and sport. Leaders have built strong links with parents through drop-in sessions, parent and toddler groups and 'dine with your child' session and this is contributing to an inclusive community where parents and carers

are becoming increasingly involved in pupils' learning. Pupils could describe how their parents' involvement in the completion of their reading records had encouraged them to read more widely.

You and your deputy headteacher are developing a new team of middle leaders who are entrusted with clear responsibilities for checking the quality of work across the school and for sharing good practice. All teachers are involved in regular reviews of pupils' progress that informs teaching and the use of supporting interventions. You monitor the progress of individual pupils closely but your tracking systems do not consistently provide you with a clear overview of the progress of key groups. Teachers use key school priorities to inform their performance management objectives and review these throughout the year. Leaders invite external partners from the academy trust, local schools, specialist consultants and the local authority to review aspects of their work and support further improvement. While it is important to maintain these networks to strengthen capacity, it is also important that the school does not become over-reliant on external partners. The balance of close monitoring and continuing professional development supports pupils in achieving improving rates of progress.

Governors are committed to the success of the school and have developed appropriate structures to monitor performance. They work closely with senior leaders to secure ongoing improvement and support the headteacher in some of the more challenging conversations that have taken place in recent years. Governors are visible and make frequent visits to the school and school events, with each governor attached to a class. They review teachers' performance and pay progression closely and have the skills and tenacity to hold leaders to account. They have a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement but do not always use school systems effectively enough to review current progress. Governors track and hold leaders to account for the use of additional funding although some of their reviews can be too descriptive and lack evaluative rigour.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and have commissioned regular audits to continually assure the rigour of their practices. Robust checks are made on the suitability of adults working at the school and leaders pursue safe recruitment practices. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues. Teachers are extremely mindful of the well-being of pupils in their care and leaders thoroughly pursue concerns over pupils' welfare. Pupils feel safe and their parents agree. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online.

Inspection findings

- You have worked hard to address the need to improve provision for children in the early years. Your new leader has improved planning and the creative use of indoor and outdoor spaces so that children are consistently involved in purposeful

activities that address their interests and learning needs. As a result of stronger planning, better teaching and closer monitoring, progress has consistently improved and children are now achieving good levels of development above those seen nationally.

- Teachers have developed a consistent focus on improving standards of reading. Teachers and teaching assistants teach phonics effectively and this has enabled increasing proportions of pupils to achieve outcomes in the phonics screening check above those seen nationally. Pupils could describe how the use of reading records has widened their reading. The effective teaching of inference and deduction skills in the classroom enables pupils to make strong progress and reach standards of attainment above those seen nationally.
- Pupils are developing an awareness of different styles of writing and are given opportunities for extended writing. As a result, they make positive progress and are using more ambitious vocabulary and more complex sentence structures as they move through the school, although boys' progress in writing is weaker. Pupils' accuracy in aspects of spelling and grammar is not as assured as their control of style and form. The need to write at length in other subjects identified in the last inspection is evident in religious education and some topic books but this is not consistently embedded across the curriculum.
- The significant improvements evident in mathematics in 2015 were not carried through into the new national curriculum assessments in 2016 where rates of progress were below those seen nationally. Leaders are aware of this and have already introduced new programmes to develop deeper understanding. In books and lessons, there was evidence of increasing opportunities to develop reasoning and address more complex problems, although secure understanding is not yet embedded.
- Teachers track pupils' progress at regular assessment points and teams of teachers meet regularly to review standards with one another and partner schools. Leaders have an understanding of individual pupils but systems do not clearly provide an overview of the progress of key groups of pupils.
- The school assessment system is understood by pupils and teachers provide written and verbal feedback in line with the school's policy which supports pupils in making good progress.
- Teachers encourage good levels of conduct in lessons and around the school site and, as a result, pupils behave positively and show consideration for one another and adults. They demonstrate an understanding of the school's values and these contribute to respectful and considerate attitudes. Teachers encourage pupils to show increasing levels of independence in their learning. Pupils feel valued and supported by their teachers and they are willing to contribute their views in class.
- Rates of attendance are improving as a result of more robust tracking systems, better family support and heightened challenge when required. Overall rates of attendance have improved over a three year period, although disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remain more likely to be absent than their peers.
- Disadvantaged pupils made good progress in reading and writing at key stage 2

in 2016 and at key stage 1 reached standards that were close to or above those seen nationally for other pupils. Disadvantaged pupils also achieved standards in the phonics screening check above those seen nationally and made good progress in the early years foundation stage. However, disadvantaged pupils made weaker progress in mathematics and did not reach higher levels of attainment at key stage 1 or 2.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made extremely good progress in reading in 2016 although their progress in writing and mathematics was not as strong. They are currently making better progress across the majority of year groups. The most able pupils made good progress in writing and mathematics in 2016 but less progress in reading, while the proportion working at levels of greater depth were below those seen nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop and consolidate new leadership roles and support new teachers to ensure that the capacity for further improvement is sustained
- strengthen the curriculum and the quality of teaching to enable pupils to make better progress in mathematics and in aspects of their spelling, vocabulary and grammar
- ensure that tracking systems provide incisive overviews to support teachers in improving the progress of key groups of pupils, including boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able, and to support governors in holding leaders to account
- provide additional challenge in teaching to enable a higher proportion of pupils to work at levels of greater depth.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Middlesbrough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Redcar and Cleveland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. I also spoke to members of the governing body, including the chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I also talked to a school improvement partner and the director of education from the local authority. I

undertook learning walks with yourself and your deputy headteacher. I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, behaviour and attendance information and pupil tracking. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 14 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, seven free-text responses, and 13 responses to the staff questionnaire.