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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Derek Sutherland
Executive Headteacher
Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Hamilton Drive
York
North Yorkshire
YO24 4JW

Dear Mr Sutherland

Short inspection of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 the school was judged to be good in March 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 upheld a school culture where pupils' talents are celebrated and where there is a real sense of community. As one pupil told me, 'It is like one big family here.'

The previous inspection asked you to improve the quality of pupils' writing and to give teachers clear guidance on teaching writing. You joined a research group along with several other local authorities looking at best practice in teaching and assessing writing. This has made a real difference to the quality of teaching in Year 6 and this is now being spread to other year groups. The work pupils are doing is now challenging, engaging and based on real-life experiences. Teaching has pace and pupils' attitudes to learning are impressive. Improvements in writing are also apparent in the work being done by Year 2 pupils, who are expected to reach higher standards in writing than they did in 2016. However, our joint observations of pupils' learning showed that there is scope for low-ability pupils to make faster progress. The last inspection also asked you to ensure that phonics lessons are pitched at the right level. You agreed in our discussions that this has not been as successful and has led to a drop in the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard at the end of Year 1.

Since the last inspection, leaders and governors were aware that they needed to shift the focus from operational day-to-day management of the school to a more

strategic view of leadership. This has resulted in more clarity about what needs to be improved, by when and by whom. This has led to improvements in how you link British values to your strong Catholic values, how governors oversee finance and standards, how attendance is monitored and how you make strong links with parents. We agree that there is now a need for you to revisit your development plan to ensure that the milestones are measurable, so that governors can hold you and your senior team to account closely on their success.

Pupils are polite, respectful, well behaved and hugely appreciative of the efforts of their teachers. One pupil told me that teachers 'cannot do enough to help us out'. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness continues to be well developed but there are gaps in their awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, which you are aware of. Pupils have an impressive knowledge of world religions and explained what they had done to celebrate international women's day.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. You have a strong culture of safeguarding in the school whereby all staff are well aware of what they should do if they have any concerns. Your procedures for vetting and checking new members of staff are robust.

The records I saw showed that you have a proactive approach to safeguarding. Notably, the close relationship you have with North Yorkshire Police helps your work with families who might need additional support.

In this inspection I investigated the absence rates of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Over the last three years, these have increased. The strengthened procedures for monitoring attendance have been successful this year, with a sharp decrease in absence for both groups of pupils.

The pupils I spoke to understood how to use the internet safely and told me that bullying is a rarity. This is verified in your records, which show that you have very few instances of bullying. Parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, expressed no concerns about bullying or behaviour.

Inspection findings

- I was curious to find out why the outcomes of the 2016 tests showed that pupils had made less progress in writing than they had in mathematics or reading. This was largely the result of teachers adapting to the requirements of the new writing standards. Also, assessments of pupils' work were not as rigorous and regular as they could have been.
- The work of the current Year 6 demonstrated that pupils are making good progress in their writing skills. This is the result of the work you have been doing

with other schools to improve assessment. Pupils are confident writers, with a good grasp of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

- A particular strength of teaching and assessment is how pupils make multiple revisions to their work as a result of the incisive and detailed comments provided by teachers. Pupils confidently told me how they had improved their writing between each edit and how much their final version improved compared to their first draft.
- Writing was also a weaker subject in key stage 1 in 2016. My visits to Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms showed some strong practice in teaching writing, with middle-ability pupils and the most able making rapid progress. Most now have good handwriting skills and a greater range of punctuation and vocabulary. However, low-ability pupils make slower progress in acquiring the basics in handwriting and punctuation.
- I also looked closely at the teaching of phonics. You agreed that, over time, this has not been as regular or systematic as you would like. This has led to fewer pupils than average meeting the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check. Phonics is now taught daily. However, there are remaining gaps in pupils' understanding of how to link letters to sounds. Teachers sometimes move on too quickly, without allowing pupils to practise writing the new words they have learned. This means that work has to be repeated for those pupils who have not yet grasped the skills. You have plans in place to address these inconsistencies in teaching.
- My final focus was the effectiveness of the governance arrangements. The discussions I had with governors and my scrutiny of governance documents showed that the governing body has increased the challenge and support provided to the school. This has led to them measuring the impact of what you are doing to raise standards with greater rigour than before. Governors' skills in holding the school to account have improved as a result of the recent skills audit they completed.
- Your development plan and self-evaluation summary show that you and your senior leaders have identified the right areas for improvement. However, you agree that some of the milestones related to teaching need to be sharper and easier to measure to ensure that they are having a positive effect on pupils' learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics in Year 1 improves so that more pupils reach the required standard in the phonics check
- less-able pupils in key stage 1 who struggle with writing are supported in acquiring the basics of letter formation, spelling and grammar so that they make faster progress

- development plans have sharper milestones to measure the impact of teaching on pupils' learning
- pupils develop a greater awareness of LGBT issues.

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 York. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Jones
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your two heads of school, three members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority. I spoke to six pupils from Year 6 over lunchtime and listened to four Year 2 pupils reading. While in classrooms, I observed teaching, spoke to pupils and looked through the work in their books.

I considered a range of documentation, including the 58 responses to Parent View, the school development plan, governance documents, the summary of self-evaluation, records relating to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and safeguarding documents.