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Mrs Madeleine Wilson
Headteacher
St Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Durham Road
Houghton le Spring
Tyne and Wear
DH5 8NF

Dear Mrs Wilson

No formal designation monitoring inspection of St Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit with Michael Reeves, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 28 March 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documentation relating to child protection arrangements and the school's record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children. Records of attendance and behavioural incidents, as well as the school's arrangements for following up absence and incidents, were also examined. School policies and curriculum documents were reviewed. The school's work to support pupils in learning how to stay safe was investigated. The security of the school site was reviewed, alongside risk assessments of the premises and on- and off-site activities. Inspectors observed pupils at the start and end of the school day, at breaktime and lunchtime, and spoke to groups of pupils formally and informally. Inspectors visited classrooms to ascertain pupils' conduct and their attitudes to their safety. Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and deputy headteacher and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff. Inspectors met with a group of governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing board. Inspectors also met with a representative of the local authority and conducted a telephone discussion with a diocesan representative.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

St Michael's is smaller than an average-sized primary school, catering for children aged 4 to 11. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below the national average. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in January 2017. A new chair and vice-chair of the governing board were appointed in December 2016.

Main Findings

Pupils who spoke with inspectors indicated that they feel safe in school. The vast majority of parents who expressed a view through Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), or who spoke with inspectors, believe that their children are safe and well cared for. Bullying is rare and pupils are confident that staff help them to address any issues that arise. Pupils conduct themselves well in school and recognise the importance of respect and tolerance as values to live by. Pupils told me that differences in people's faith, culture or lifestyle are unimportant; what is important is whether they are good people who treat others well. Parents who spoke to inspectors indicated how much they value the ethos of the school, where pupils are supported to become caring and considerate individuals who 'give' of themselves to others.

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is rich in opportunities to teach pupils how to stay safe. This begins from an early age, where children in the Reception Year can explain how they play safely on the outdoor equipment and use scissors in an appropriate way. Pupils show a good understanding of road safety and are clear about what to do in the event of fire. A visit to a pharmacy has helped them to appreciate risks linked to medicines. Older pupils noted that their science lessons have helped them understand the significant risks and long-term damage to health associated with smoking.

Where any concerns relating to pupils' safety emerge, you address them rapidly. For example, you took effective action in response to a recent online safety incident, which occurred outside school hours. Parents and carers benefited from a guidance leaflet, written by leaders, to help them manage their children's online activity. Leaders enlisted the support of Northumbria Police to help ensure that older pupils have a firm understanding of online safety risks and the potential criminal implications of acting inappropriately online. You are also aware of your responsibilities to promote pupils' mental health and well-being. You have provided nurture sessions for some older pupils to help them to manage any anxieties or pressures they may experience, particularly as they approach their national assessments in Year 6. New leaders are keen to encourage pupils to take more responsibility for their behaviour and safety, and have already supported pupils to create a new 'code of conduct' which is now in place across the school.

Leaders have ensured that staff receive regular and appropriate training so that they are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff demonstrate a clear grasp of the indicators that would raise concerns about the safety of pupils. In the light of recent changes to the leadership of the school, you have worked quickly to ensure that you have maintained two fully trained safeguarding leads on the senior leadership team. This ensures that, in your absence, the deputy headteacher is capable of managing any safeguarding concerns which arise.

The safety of pupils is a high priority for you and your staff. Thorough risk assessments are conducted in advance of educational visits. Pupils are clear about staff's expectations of their conduct when they are, for example, travelling on the school minibuses. The site manager ensures that robust checks are made on the safety of sporting and play equipment. The school site is well maintained and secure for pupils and staff.

A very few pupils demonstrate more challenging behaviour in school. New senior leaders have acted quickly to provide additional support and to plan more precisely for these pupils' needs. While leaders keep records of any behaviour incidents which occur, and include information about their investigations and dialogue with parents, the written evidence of the work with pupils to follow up these incidents is less detailed. Similarly, while early safeguarding concerns are carefully recorded for the very few pupils about whom the school has worries, the work undertaken by staff to keep a check on these pupils is not always recorded as thoroughly. You and the governing board are aware of this and have already identified the new system you intend to introduce after the Easter break to remedy this.

Leaders have ensured that a range of checks required by statutory guidance are conducted to ensure the suitability of adults, both staff and volunteers, to work with children. New staff receive training on aspects of safety and safeguarding as part of their induction. Visitors to the school are given clear and detailed information on school procedures relating to safety. However, leaders have not ensured that the details, including the dates, of checks on the suitability of adults are collated into one single central record, to comply with statutory guidance. You began the process of addressing this during the inspection and recognise the need to ensure that information is recorded in one document so that it can be easily checked.

Until recently, governors have failed to take appropriate steps to assure themselves of the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the curriculum for pupils' personal development and safety. The newly appointed chair and vice-chair of the governing board identified this and have taken urgent action over the past term to evaluate safeguarding arrangements, alongside new senior leaders. This includes commissioning an external review, with the support of the local authority. The new vice-chair of the governing board, who is also the designated governor for safeguarding, has the required knowledge and skills of safeguarding practice, drawn from her professional experience, to effectively hold leaders to account for their work. She has provided governors with updates on recent safeguarding guidance, and further training is scheduled to ensure that all governors fully understand their statutory responsibilities in relation to keeping children safe. The new chair and

vice-chair of the governing board have also set clearer expectations of the information they wish to receive from you, on a regular basis, as a full governing board, to ensure they keep a careful check on this area of the school's work.

A number of policy documents related to safeguarding and pupils' behaviour had not previously been reviewed promptly by leaders and governors. You and the new deputy headteacher, working with the new chair and vice-chair of the governing board, have rapidly addressed this. The school now has a safeguarding policy which is in line with the Department for Education's statutory guidance, 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2016'. Leaders and governors have not ensured that the school's website is compliant with statutory guidance and recognise that the school's recently reviewed behaviour policy needs to be available online.

External support

Since the appointment of the new chair and vice-chair of the governing board, leaders, including governors, have worked proactively with the local authority to seek external validation of the work of the school. For example, a recently commissioned local authority review of the school explored the behaviour and attitudes to learning demonstrated by pupils. The local authority knows the school well as a result of this work. New leaders have benefited from the support and challenge of the local authority school improvement partner in helping them to identify the most important priorities for the school. Governors have commissioned further support, through the local authority, to enable them to keep a close check on safeguarding practice in the future.

Priorities for further improvement

Ensure that:

- details of the checks conducted on the suitability of staff to work with children are fully recorded in one single, central document
- records of safeguarding concerns or behaviour incidents include appropriate detail of the follow-up work and checks conducted by staff
- the school's website is compliant with statutory guidance
- the full governing board receive the training and information they need to enable them to monitor the work of leaders in relation to safeguarding and the curriculum for pupils' personal development, welfare and safety.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing board, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector