

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



24 May 2017

Mr Stephen Fallon  
Headteacher  
St Stephens Roman Catholic Primary School Aided  
Goathland Avenue  
Longbenton  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
Tyne and Wear  
NE12 8FA

Dear Mr Fallon

### **Short inspection of St Stephens Roman Catholic Primary School Aided**

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 January 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

You are highly respected by the school community as a dedicated headteacher who is uncompromising in the aim to ensure that pupils achieve the very best possible outcomes. The school has been on quite a journey since the previous inspection. You have overseen a move into a new school and have worked tirelessly to develop the premises and ensure that St Stephens is seen as a school that welcomes pupils with a range of abilities and needs.

Staff and governors share your belief that all pupils can succeed and, therefore, support ongoing strategies and endeavours to improve the life chances of pupils in your care. Consequently, boys and girls of all abilities make good progress from their different starting points. You value your staff and are committed to 'growing everyone in the school' so that pupils' wide-ranging needs are met very well. Since the last inspection, governance has improved significantly. Governors are now highly skilled and have sharpened their practice. They do not shy away from posing difficult questions to staff and school leaders to ensure that everyone considers the impact of their work on the pupils who need the most help. As a result, teaching is effective, and the level of care and support is very high.

Leaders have provided intensive support for teachers to understand the expectations of the new national curriculum. Teachers are using their clear understanding of pupils' achievement to address previous gaps in learning. This is now being used more accurately to match tasks in lessons and meet the needs of most pupils, and especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, while the needs of most are met well, there are times when the most able pupils could be moved on more quickly. On some occasions the work is too easy for them and the most able need more challenging work. On the other hand, opportunities for pupils to work independently are now a strong feature of the school's work.

Children behave very well. They are courteous and polite. Staff seize opportunities to show pupils how to care for one another, build pupils' confidence and flourish. In lessons, pupils show that they work well collaboratively and discuss and debate ideas in a very considered manner. Most pupils have very positive attitudes to their work; however, the presentation of their work is not always of a consistently high quality. Pupils relish the many opportunities that allow them to take responsibility. Older pupils use their well-developed social skills to act as school buddies to mediate and solve friendship problems on the playground. Pupils say, and I agree, that this is a very kind and friendly school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You ensure that staff are trained to an appropriate level and the governing body provide effective challenge and check that staff implement the school's comprehensive safeguarding policies effectively. Governors are quick to action improvements where concerns have been identified. You ensure that there is a culture of safeguarding that takes into account current issues and risks posed to pupils.

A very positive feature of this school is the way staff take the time to get to know individual pupils and build strong relationships with their families. They keep a close eye on pupils and provide them with the right support should a need arise. You work closely with other agencies where necessary to challenge and support families and to assure yourselves that pupils are safe. You are correctly not afraid to further challenge other agencies if you feel that support is not forthcoming.

Staff are tenacious in their work to keep pupils happy and safe from harm. Pupils confirm that they feel safe and that they know who to go to if they have concerns. They say that bullying happens occasionally but that leaders and teachers are good at 'sorting it out'. Pupils are supportive of each other. They are considerate and behave well.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your team work tirelessly in preparing pupils well for life in modern Britain. The school's values ensure that the personal development of pupils is threaded through all aspects of school life. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about

a range of cultures and consider, for example, the challenges facing refugees as they struggle to access human rights. Through their understanding of democracy, pupils recognise the power they have to make a difference.

- Pupils discuss matters of relevance showing a good deal of empathy and maturity. For example, pupils in two Year 4 classes were articulate in debating the pros and cons for animal welfare in zoos. As a result of such opportunities, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school.
- A broad and balanced curriculum and a wide variety of themes inspire pupils' learning and are often both wide ranging and of a high quality. In a small number of classes, the coverage of science, history and geography skills is less thorough than in others, but you are currently considering whether to continue with the present curriculum.
- Pupils also learn about a range of different faiths. They spoke confidently about the religious festivals of Judaism and the Muslim faith and link their knowledge and understanding to the school's values. This supports pupils to develop tolerance and respect for others.
- Frequent visits and trips support further learning and help pupils to play an active role in celebrating their local environment and heritage. In addition, a wide range of clubs and activities after school provide numerous opportunities to enjoy sporting and creative activities. Pupils are very clear about the benefits of healthy diet and the need for exercise from the curriculum and activities in which they participate.
- Leaders and governors make effective use of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils to ensure that they make good progress. You provide a wealth of interventions, both academic and emotionally, to ensure that pupils achieve well. For example, the school employs additional teachers to help pupils catch up in their reading and number work. Where interventions do not work, your leadership team have been swift to stop them and adopt a new approach. You have successfully ensured that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved and is now in line with the national average.
- Funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used judiciously to provide high-quality support. As a result, most pupils make accelerated progress from their starting points and are particularly well catered for. You are assiduous in your determination to provide the very best support for every child and there are clear signs that this work is having a marked difference in improving pupils' progress.
- In 2016, pupils made good progress overall, but you correctly identified that the achievement of pupils in reading at key stage 2 was not as strong as it was in writing and mathematics. You have been determined to tackle this dip and the rich culture of reading is supporting all pupils, including the most able, to make good progress. Pupils enjoy and speak enthusiastically about their reading. Their reading journals show that they read widely and often and can identify how authors use language to evoke a response in the reader. Innovative ideas such as the reading village and book swap cabinets help to involve parents in their children's reading.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers further accelerate the progress of the most able pupils by ensuring that teachers provide more challenging work and refine their teaching to move them on more quickly
- expectations of teachers and aspirations of pupils are raised for the neat presentation of their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Bywater  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you to discuss your evaluation of the school. We visited lessons together and looked at the work in pupils' books, spoke to the pupils about their learning and heard them read. Additionally, I looked at external reports and information about pupils' attainment and progress and I spoke with a group of pupils to discuss their work and gather their views of the school. I spoke with five representatives from the governing body. I also took into account the 17 survey responses from Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire for parents, as well as the 20 responses to the staff questionnaire and 85 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding and recruitment arrangements.