

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 September 2017

Mrs Siobhan Foster
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School Aided
Great Lime Road
Forest Hall
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE12 7AB

Dear Mrs Foster

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School Aided

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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.

Following the recent resignation of the executive headteacher, the local authority and governors have acted quickly to put in place secure leadership arrangements. Everyone in school understands their role and responsibilities and those new to post have appropriate support in place. Having only very recently become the acting headteacher of the school, you have quickly and accurately evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses and produced well-considered plans to move the school forward. You know that there are areas that need to improve and have used the start of the school year to focus your staff on these priorities. Furthermore, you have arranged appropriate training and professional development opportunities to support them.

Parents are very positive and praise the warm, caring and nurturing atmosphere that typifies the school. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) would recommend the school. I found pupils to be polite, welcoming and courteous to one another across the day. You and your staff hold high expectations and are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe and enjoy their learning. Teachers prepare lessons that are well planned and engaging and staff are skilled at involving pupils in lively activities that require them to think deeply. The review of the curriculum you led last term is ensuring that topics now embrace the

new national curriculum fully. Gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are being covered more thoroughly and wider skills in subjects such as music, science and history are being integrated more thoughtfully into topics.

Since the last inspection, pupils have made strong academic progress and attained standards above those seen nationally by the time they leave the school. This has prepared them well for the next stage of their education. Outcomes have been particularly strong in reading and writing. Pupils build effectively on the good start they make in the Reception class and at key stage 1. However, their progress in mathematics in key stage 2 has lagged behind that seen in English. Provisional results for mathematics in 2017 were unexpectedly disappointing. A thorough review has identified why this was the case and prompt actions are being taken to address this. The mathematics coordinator is working closely with the local authority to make the necessary changes to the way mathematics is taught and the early signs in pupils' books are promising. Nevertheless, there remains much to do to ensure that teachers consistently develop pupils' skills in reasoning and problem-solving so that pupils make as much progress as that seen in English.

The governors are experienced and keep well informed through the regular visits that they make. They have stepped up their work recently in order to ensure that the new leadership arrangements are smoothly embedded. Additional meetings calendared for the start of this term are ensuring that governors are checking the new development plan and the separate mathematics action plan. While these plans are detailed, they do not include sufficiently clear milestones across the year for governors to evaluate the impact that these plans have on pupils' learning and progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that all members of staff are trained to an appropriate level and understand the duty upon them to act if they have any concerns about a child's safety or welfare. Teachers new to the school are full of praise for the induction and training they receive. Rigorous checks are made when new staff are recruited and the same level of care is given to checking the suitability of other adults who visit or work in the school.

You work effectively with other agencies when there is a need to do so. This has ensured that recent child protection cases have been resolved quickly and in the best interests of the child. You also respond proactively and thoughtfully when issues arise. For example, when a pupil made a racist comment last year, following a terrorist attack in the country, the school worked with a charity to run workshops about the Muslim faith and gave pupils the chance to meet members of the Muslim community. Pupils and parents responded positively to this approach.

Pupils feel safe and know whom to go to if they have any concerns. They say that bullying is rare and that teachers are good at sorting it out if it does happen. However, pupils told me they would prefer teachers to tackle arguments and squabbles between pupils more authoritatively, in order to 'nip them in the bud'.

Inspection findings

- Children settle quickly in the Reception class and benefit from a lively range of activities that stimulate their curiosity. A good blend of child-initiated activities with more direct teaching of basic skills ensures that children make good progress. The improved outdoor space encourages them to explore and take some risks in developing their physical skills. By the time pupils begin Year 1 an above-average proportion are working at the level expected for their age.
- Pupils make good progress across key stage 1. Reading programmes successfully help pupils to grasp the sounds letters make. Almost all pupils, including the disadvantaged, attain the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check. Pupils who fall below the expectation receive additional support that gets them back on track quickly. Pupils are keen to read and quickly progress to reading more-challenging texts. There are some appropriate books in the library for the most able and committed readers. You are keen to develop the library further so that it entices more pupils to use the resources available.
- The quality of pupils' reading and writing in each phase of the school is strong. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make similarly strong progress to other pupils in the school. Pupils take great pride in their handwriting and presentation and strive to reach the expectations exemplified in classroom displays. Pupils are capable of sustaining their efforts and improving their work in response to the feedback they receive. However, although many pupils make swift progress, my checks on pupils' English books showed that the most able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently.
- Provisional results for 2017 indicate that progress in mathematics across key stage 2 is less secure. You have rightly identified this as your most pressing priority to address. Evidence in last year's books shows that pupils developed secure calculation skills but did not have enough opportunities to apply these skills to solving tricky problems. Too many of the challenges they were set were too easy and did not require multiple steps. As a result, pupils struggled to meet the more challenging requirements of the national curriculum tests. You are determined to tackle this dip and have brokered the support of the local authority mathematics specialist to work with staff across the year. You have also identified other schools to visit where previously weaker mathematics outcomes have been successfully tackled.
- Your review of the wider curriculum has helped teachers to understand better the expectations of the new national curriculum. Newly prepared topics integrate age-related content from different subjects effectively. Teachers have a better grasp of progression in different subjects and use this to set suitably challenging learning objectives. You are also working to ensure that the standard of writing is sustained in pupils' science, history and geography work. This is helping to raise expectations across the whole curriculum.
- Your evaluation of the school has also identified the need to strengthen the skills of middle leaders, some of whom are relatively new to post. You have arranged suitable leadership training through the diocese and networking opportunities

with counterparts in other schools. You have also prepared a rigorous monitoring calendar for leaders to follow in order to check the quality of provision. Your middle leaders are not complacent, recognising that they need to be thorough in order to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently strong.

- The governors also show no complacency and make regular visits to keep informed on the work of the school. For example, they audit the school's safeguarding arrangements annually, check the quality of work in books and visit classrooms. They were, however, surprised by the dip in mathematics results last year, indicating that assessment information was not sufficiently reliable. With new leadership arrangements in place, governors need to assure themselves that they are systematic in holding leaders to account and that actions set out in improvement plans have a positive impact on pupil outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make more rapid progress in mathematics across key stage 2 and attain standards in line with those seen in English
- regular checks are made on the quality of teaching of mathematics and teachers receive precise feedback on how to improve their practice
- the impact of actions set out in the school's improvement plans are systematically reviewed at key points across the year.

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

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, the acting deputy headteacher, two teachers, representatives of the local authority and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together we visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the impact of your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' work with the English and mathematics coordinators, in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I also walked around the school to meet pupils informally and observed their behaviour and conduct. I met with a group of parents and looked at the 30 responses to

Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). I also considered the five responses to the staff survey and 51 responses to the pupil survey. I looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, external test results and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school, the breadth of the curriculum and the quality of leadership and management. I also looked closely at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.