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Mrs Alison Miller
Executive Headteacher
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Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mrs Miller

Short inspection of St George's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 November 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 May 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 and the staff at St George's RC Primary are passionately committed to meeting the needs of pupils within the disadvantaged community you serve. Over half of your pupils are eligible to receive the pupil premium and around one in 10 of your pupils speak English as an additional language. In addition, a high proportion of pupils joins or leaves the school during key stages. Nevertheless, pupils thrive because teaching over time is of good quality and pupils display consistently positive attitudes to learning. Pupils from different ethnic groups told me that they feel very welcomed and included from the start. You take particular care to check the impact that the additional support you provide has on pupils' progress and attendance. The extra help staff provide for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and for pupils who speak English as an additional language is carefully recorded and checked across the year to determine whether it is working effectively.

All members of staff who responded to the staff survey said that the school has improved under your leadership. Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, agree and all would recommend the school. You hold an accurate evaluation of the school and know its strengths and areas for development well. Your plans for improvement are sharply written and give the staff a clear sense of direction. You have also built an effective working relationship with the governing

body. The governors have undertaken appropriate training and have become much more active in the school. They make frequent visits to gauge the effect of leaders' actions to improve the school. Where they need to, they challenge and hold leaders firmly to account. These qualities of leadership have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection.

The improvements to mathematics teaching are a good example of your effective leadership. When you became headteacher approximately three years ago, you recognised that the school had poor planning in place for mathematics teaching. Since then, you and the mathematics leader have addressed this and raised everyone's expectations. Training has been provided, which has improved teachers' subject knowledge. Teachers are increasingly challenging pupils to master basic mathematical skills and training them in how to solve more challenging problems. Pupils practise basic calculations against the clock every day, and the introduction of 'Discovery Fridays', when pupils investigate more complex problems, is a direct response designed to address a weakness in pupils' reasoning skills. Last year, outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in mathematics were disappointing and revealed some gaps in pupils' knowledge. In particular, the most able pupils made less progress than they should and none attained the higher standard. The picture for pupils currently in the school is much stronger, however, and around a third of pupils in each year group are currently on track to attain the higher standard in mathematics.

You have provided your staff with a good range of training opportunities to develop their skills. This year, you have established a link with Gateshead local authority to access a broad range of training. Your middle leaders are already benefiting from the leadership programme they are attending. The quality of their checks on teaching and learning were too generalised and lacked detail in the past. More recent checks are becoming more searching and, as a result, the feedback that staff receive is becoming more specific and helpful. However, they need to hone their skills further, as some basic weaknesses in the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation are being missed, and some teachers set tasks that do not ask enough of some pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders take a rigorous approach to safeguarding pupils. Thorough checks are made on adults who work in or visit the school, and staff training is kept up to date and in line with the latest government guidance. Displays in the staff room and weekly briefings ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are well understood. Leaders ensure that detailed records of actions taken to protect children are maintained. Your work on the Newcastle school safeguarding partnership ensures that you keep your staff well informed and knowledgeable. The school draws on a range of external agencies to support the school's more vulnerable pupils and carefully tracks the effect of these partnerships.

Inspection findings

- Children enter the early years with a range of starting points, although, on average, have skills below those typical for their age. Some children take time to settle and staff work hard initially to develop good routines of listening and concentrating. Teachers begin to introduce more formal sessions on sounds, letters and numbers when children are ready. Over time, children make good progress and develop a secure grasp of basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Reception, the proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development is in line with that seen nationally.
- Pupils, including the disadvantaged, continue to make good progress across key stage 1. Almost all pupils attain the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check, and pupils quickly develop into fluent and confident readers. In 2017, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected and the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 was consistently above national averages.
- You are not afraid to make changes to provision, however. The relatively high number of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in your current Year 1 class means that some are not ready to start more formal education. You have thoughtfully reorganised classrooms and created a zoned space in which Year 1 and Reception-aged pupils are learning alongside one another. The teaching team has adapted its approach so that more formal teaching takes place as and when pupils are ready. Initial signs are that the approach is working well. Governors are scrutinising the approach carefully, which you plan to review in January 2018.
- Support for pupils who speak English as an additional language is effective and improving. As this group of pupils is increasing in size, you have begun to review provision more systematically. A lead member of staff has received appropriate training and you track the progress and attainment of this group of pupils discretely. During my visit, I watched some pupils receive good additional teaching to help them with day-to-day vocabulary and to practise pronunciation. Your most recent assessment information shows that these pupils are making similarly good progress to that of other pupils.
- Current pupils are making good progress across key stage 2 and expectations are high for the current Years 4, 5 and 6 classes. There is little difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. Published data from last year needs to be treated with caution, as a high proportion of pupils left and joined the school during the key stage. Because of this, you track the progress of each individual pupil carefully and regularly review assessment information and the work in pupils' books with teachers. Your own checks show, over time, most teaching to be of good or better quality. However, when we visited lessons, we agreed that some teaching we observed did not challenge the most able pupils sufficiently. My scrutiny of pupils' books also found expectations for the quality of handwriting and presentation to be variable. For example, some pupils do not use the squared paper in their books to set out their mathematics work correctly. Consequently, some pupils make some mistakes, which are not being picked up and addressed by the teacher or by middle leaders in their

monitoring.

- Good leadership has also considerably improved the overall level of attendance. In 2015 and 2016, the overall level of attendance was well below that seen in primary schools nationally. As a result, you commissioned an external review of your systems to manage attendance and implemented a range of new approaches. A 'walking bus' in the morning has promoted effectively good attendance from within the community, and you have employed an attendance officer on a part-time basis who works hard with families. You agree attendance contracts with some of your hard-to-reach families, and pupils have responded well to rewards such as the chance to participate in the partnership programme with Newcastle United. Last year, overall attendance improved and so far this academic year it is close to the 2016 national average. There remains a more stubborn group of pupils who miss school regularly, of whom a disproportionate number are from disadvantaged homes. As a result, this remains a priority that governors have tasked you with improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching is closely monitored and findings are quickly used to address any weaknesses
- the standard of pupils' handwriting and presentation improves
- the level of persistent absence, especially of disadvantaged pupils, is further reduced.

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 Newcastle-upon-Tyne. 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 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, you and I 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 met with the mathematics leader and, together, we looked in detail at some pupils' work, in order to evaluate the progress that pupils had made over

time. I walked around the school to look at pupils' behaviour and conduct at social times.

I looked at the 20 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and took into account the 10 responses to the staff survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school, especially in mathematics. I also looked at the quality of support for pupils who speak English as an additional language and at your work to improve levels of attendance. I looked at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.