

23 January 2018

Mrs Elaine Dodsworth
Headteacher
St Cuthbert's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School
Parkfield Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 3SY

Dear Mrs Dodsworth

Short inspection of St Cuthbert's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

When you took up post as headteacher in September 2016 you hit the ground running. You quickly formed an effective partnership with the deputy headteacher, raised everyone's expectations and began improving each phase of the school. Together, you have developed effective systems to monitor the quality of provision and to track pupils' progress. You ensure all members of staff are held to account for the progress pupils make from their different starting points. Where teaching was weak you have taken decisive action. As a result, pupils receive a good standard of education. Parents, staff and pupils recognise this and, in turn, are fully on board with the direction the school is taking.

You, your staff and the governors all display a passionate commitment to meeting the needs of the pupils. Close to half of your pupils are eligible for the pupil premium and around a quarter speak English as an additional language. The make-up of your community is changing rapidly and includes a growing number of different ethnic groups, including a sizable Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community. One result of this is that an increasing proportion of pupils join or leave the school during key stages. You are adapting well to these challenges. For example, your staff and governors are increasingly representative of the different cultural groups you serve. The school does much to help younger children quickly acquire language and the curriculum effectively promotes children's rights and an understanding of British values. Aspirations are high for every pupil and this is typified through the 'bright futures' initiative in which different careers are highlighted and former pupils

visit the school to share their positive journeys into adulthood.

Since the last inspection, much has been done to improve the start children make when they enter the school in the Nursery or Reception classes. Many children enter the school with relatively low starting points and skills below those expected for their age. Your classrooms and outdoor area are well resourced and teachers and other adults place a stronger emphasis on teaching early reading, writing and number skills from the very start. In the last inspection report, leaders were asked to boost the progress children made in acquiring reading skills. Since then the school has firmly established its preferred approach to teaching phonics. Teachers are well trained and teach with energy and purpose to ensure that children quickly acquire the sounds that letters and groups of letters make. These skills are then reinforced when children choose what to do for themselves because activities are well designed and encourage children to read and write. Leaders have improved the rigour of assessment so that teaching more precisely addresses gaps in children's knowledge and skills. As a result, children make good progress in the early years and outcomes have improved to match those seen nationally. Thoughtful arrangements are in place to support children's transition into Year 1. The proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check has risen to be in line with the national average.

Progress continues to be good across key stage 1 and by the end of Year 2 the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with that seen nationally. However, published performance data shows that progress rates across key stage 2 have been no better than average in recent years. In part, this is explained by the increase in pupils joining the school during the key stage, including some who speak little or no English when they arrive. However, you accept that the quality of teaching has not been consistently strong enough and that some disadvantaged pupils and some of the most able pupils have not made as much progress as they should.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding and care of pupils has a high priority at St Cuthbert's RC Primary School. You have ensured that the school site is secure and that thorough checks are made on all adults who work in or visit the school to work with children. You provide your staff with regular and wide-ranging training so that they fully understand their role in keeping children safe. You maintain detailed records of good quality and have good arrangements in place to brief your staff with pertinent information. Senior leaders are well supported by the school's parent support adviser who has 'the ear of the community' and together you take effective action to protect children from harm. When necessary, you work closely with external agencies and feel well supported with advice and guidance from the local authority children's hub. You and your governors reflect upon and learn from the child protection cases you manage, ensuring safeguarding arrangements are continually improving.

Inspection findings

- Your high aspirations and commitment ensure that you are well respected by your staff. You have formed a highly effective partnership with your deputy headteacher and together you are systematically addressing any weaknesses in the quality of education. You have good systems in place to check on the quality of teaching and learning and, consequently, you know your school well. You plan improvements carefully and skilfully use data to check whether your actions are having a positive effect. Governors provide you with excellent support and challenge. Their experience and equally strong commitment also means they too know the school well. They are passionate about improving children's life chances. Consequently, they rigorously check the progress pupils make across the year and hold you and your staff tightly to account.
- Improvements in teaching, learning and assessment in the early years have ensured that children now get off to a good start. From relatively low starting points, children make good progress. By the end of the Reception Year, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development has risen over time to be in line with the national average. Assessment information shows children currently in the Reception Year are on track to sustain this performance. Children who speak English as an additional language receive good support. Together, we observed a skilled member of staff actively engage children in role play and storytelling to develop their understanding of English. Although outcomes have improved, there remains work to do to ensure that disadvantaged children in the early years make more rapid progress, especially in reading, writing and mathematics, so they are fully able to access the curriculum in Year 1.
- Pupils adopt good learning habits and work industriously across the day. They make good progress across key stage 1 and attain standards in line with those seen nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils who fall short of the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check make good progress in Year 2 and almost all reach the expected standard when rechecked. The much improved and relocated library has raised the profile of reading considerably and put reading at the heart of the school. Pupils told me they have an excellent choice of books, including suitable texts for the most able readers. Pupils I listened to were able to read with fluency, could decode new words quickly using phonics skills and showed good comprehension of the text.
- Progress rates have, over time, been more average across key stage 2 and last year pupils made less than anticipated progress in mathematics. You and governors have looked closely at the reasons for this and have pinpointed where a small number of pupils fell short. You have concluded that teachers need to improve pupils' reasoning skills. You have developed a particular approach to mathematics teaching which pupils told me they enjoy. Pupils feel very comfortable to tell teachers if they are confused or need things explaining again and most teachers are adept at adapting their explanations or simplifying their examples. Teachers tailor the work they provide for pupils with different starting points well and teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the teaching of mathematics. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching is not always sharp enough

and not all members of staff demonstrate a deep enough understanding of mathematics to promote consistently rapid progress. Pleasingly, you have begun to source opportunities for members of staff to visit other schools to learn from the best practice of others.

- In recent years the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has been above or in line with the national average. However, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard has remained below that seen nationally, as not enough of the most able pupils have made the progress they should. Your assessment information shows the proportion of current pupils on track to reach the higher standard continues to be less than seen nationally. You know which pupils you need to target and have arrangements in place to provide these pupils with extra help. However, increasing the numbers who attain the higher standard remains a priority for improvement.
- The attainment of disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 2 has also been variable, despite having detailed plans in place for the use of additional funding. In recent years, their progress from their different starting points has been similar to that of other pupils nationally. However, your current assessment information shows a difference remains between their attainment and that of their peers in most year groups. Where the difference is larger you have used your funding to employ an additional teacher in order to keep class sizes small and to ensure that the work provided is precisely matched to pupils' needs. This is a good example of proactive leadership. However, further consideration should be given to boosting the progress of disadvantaged pupils as they progress across key stage 2.
- You have successfully increased the level of attendance, which was well below the national average when you took up post. The strategies you have used to engage families, coupled with the very careful monitoring of attendance patterns, have increased overall attendance to be in line with the national average for primary schools. Furthermore, the number of pupils who miss school regularly has also declined sharply. Your recent efforts to improve punctuality have also had a positive effect, sharpening the start to the school day for everyone.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- every effort is made to boost the learning of disadvantaged children in the early years so that more attain the expected standard by the end of the Reception Year
- rates of progress across key stage 2 accelerate, especially for pupils who are disadvantaged and for the most able; in doing so, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 should be improved to match that seen nationally
- teachers and teaching assistants have good opportunities to improve their teaching through learning from the strongest practitioners in and beyond the

school.

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 Stockton-on-Tees. 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 the deputy headteacher, a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together, you or your deputy and I visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, I scrutinised some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. The deputy headteacher and I looked in detail at some pupils' mathematics books in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I looked at the 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the results of your own survey of parents. I also took into account the 16 responses to Ofsted's 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 key stage 2, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and your work to improve attendance. I also looked at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.