

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Miss Natalie Fountain  
Headteacher  
St Paul's CofE Primary School  
Waterworks Road  
Ryhope  
Sunderland  
Tyne and Wear  
SR2 0LW

Dear Miss Fountain

### **Short inspection of St Paul's CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 October 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You will accept nothing but the best for pupils and this unwavering commitment has been central to your success. You have worked unrelentingly since the previous inspection to develop the quality of teaching and learning, providing sharply focused feedback to teachers and teaching assistants. Staff are entirely supportive of your vision for the school. They demonstrate a shared determination to continually improve their practice. Current teaching is securing strong progress from pupils in a wide range of subjects and more teaching is enabling pupils to make outstanding progress. Consequently, the outcomes achieved by pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have risen sharply across both key stages 1 and 2. The attainment of pupils by the time they leave the school in Year 6 is exceptionally high in reading, writing, mathematics and science. In mathematics, an area highlighted for improvement at the previous inspection, every pupil in Year 6 in summer 2017 attained the expected standard for their age. In the same year, half of the Year 6 class attained the higher standard in a range of subjects. In both the academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17, the progress made by pupils across key stage 2 places the school in the top 10% nationally.

However, this is not a school where pupils are simply coached to be successful in tests. Leaders, including the governing body, are clear about the school's mission to educate the whole child. Pupils become thoughtful, reflective individuals who collaborate maturely, challenging each other to do better. Because teachers work hard to plan lessons which capture the imagination of pupils, levels of engagement in classrooms are high. Pupils speak with pride about the 'fun twists' that adults weave into learning. Pupils' attendance is above the national average. Behaviour for learning is excellent. This was evidenced during the inspection when, despite the blizzard outside, pupils' attention remained firmly focused on their work. Pupils' enthusiasm to succeed, their sense of personal responsibility and their strong academic achievement ensure that they are exceptionally well prepared for their secondary school education.

A tangible culture of mutual respect and genuine care and concern for others permeates this school. Pupils state simply, 'We are a family.' They are candid that leaders have instilled in them the principle of 'treat others as you want to be treated'. Pupils relish the opportunity to lead aspects of school life such as the anti-bullying team and the sports leadership programme. This ensures that they have a strong stake in the school's success. Parents and carers are effusive in their praise for the school. Those who spoke to me or who completed the inspection questionnaire, Parent View, expressed their delight at the quality of education their children receive. In particular, they value the nurture and individual attention paid by staff to every pupil. As one parent commented:

'There is an obvious collective determination to bring out the best in the kids. You can almost feel it... We 100% believe that St Paul's is a special school and feel privileged to be a part of it. It all seems so effortless but we know that something so good can only be the result of a vast amount of hard work behind the scenes. We never take that for granted.'

The standards attained by children at the end of the Reception Year are above the national average and this represents strong progress from their starting points. You have focused your attention since September 2017 on improving the quality of provision in the early years so that it secures the same, exceptionally rapid progress that is evident in other areas of the school. You have made notable improvements this academic year, but you know there is still a little more to do to ensure that children make the same, substantial progress in writing and mathematics as they do in other areas of learning in the early years curriculum.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that arrangements to safeguard pupils are fit for purpose. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils are thorough. You maintain meticulous records of your appropriate actions to support those pupils who are at risk of harm. The governing body receives regular updates about safeguarding practice and challenges you to refine and enhance the arrangements that are in place to keep pupils safe.

The curriculum supports pupils to take responsibility for their own safety. Pupils spoke with authority about the importance of aspects of road safety and how they keep themselves safe online. They know the age limits associated with social media websites

and that they should not communicate with strangers online. Pupils report that bullying is simply not tolerated at St Paul's and that, on the rare occasions when pupils fall out with each other, they are well supported by adults to resolve the issue. Pupils feel safe in school and every parent who responded to the inspection questionnaire indicated that they believe that pupils are safe in the school.

## **Inspection findings**

- Continuous improvements to the teaching of writing have ensured that, throughout key stages 1 and 2, pupils develop exceptionally strong skills and become fluent and confident writers. Pupils master the basic skills of spelling, grammar and punctuation quickly. Changes to the planning process have ensured more opportunities for pupils to edit and redraft their work. Pupils make precise choices about the language and structure of their writing to ensure that it suits the intended audience and purpose. By the time they reach Years 5 and 6, standards are high and many pupils have developed a flair for writing. This high-quality writing was exemplified in a Year 5 lesson, when one pupil wrote, in response to an image depicting the Great Fire of London, 'The streets echoed with the shrieks and screams of the fire's victims.'
- Leaders have systematically improved the teaching of mathematics over time. A new scheme of work includes regular 'pre-teaching'. This ensures that those pupils who may be less confident have the secure subject knowledge to access the content covered alongside their classmates. Additional challenges deepen the learning for those pupils who have mastered the basic mathematical concepts. Teachers routinely expect pupils to explain their mathematical reasoning to each other and pupils articulate this with confidence. Pupils enjoy problem-solving activities that require them to apply their knowledge of number facts. Outcomes in mathematics have improved significantly since the previous inspection and, by the time pupils leave Year 6, they attain well above national averages.
- You have strengthened the teaching of reading, including phonics, across the school. Pupils' achievement in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has improved from below the national average in 2014 to well above average between 2015 and 2017. A new teaching approach requires pupils to regularly practise different reading skills. For example, pupils are required to summarise what they have read and to make predictions about the text. This has contributed to improving pupils' understanding of what they read. As a result, the progress and attainment of pupils in reading have risen and are high throughout the school.
- Leaders plan precisely to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. The achievement of these more vulnerable pupils is a strong focus of the regular pupil progress meetings where staff are held to account for their performance. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well, with many of these pupils making more rapid progress to reach and exceed the expected standards for their age. More than half of the disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 in 2017 reached the higher standard of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. In the Reception Year and the Year 1 phonics screening check, disadvantaged pupils outperformed other pupils nationally.
- In September 2017, you correctly identified that provision in the early years was not securing the same exceptionally strong progress that you have come to expect in

other areas of the school. Leaders have taken steps to strengthen the quality of teaching through additional training. Teachers and other adults use questions expertly to probe children's understanding and challenge their thinking. The learning environment has been enhanced to provide children with access to a wide range of learning resources. However, the school's own assessment information and children's work show that, although standards overall are just above the national average in writing and mathematics, children are not making the same substantial progress in these areas as they do in other subjects, such as reading. Teaching is not matched with the same precision to build on what children can already do in order to secure rapid progress. You have already begun to tackle this, to ensure that more children reach and exceed the expected standards for their age by the time they leave the early years.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of writing and mathematics in the early years is refined so that more children make rapid progress to reach and exceed the expected standard for their age by the end of the Reception Year.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Durham, the regional schools commissioner 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**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I conducted telephone discussions with the chair of the governing body and the diocesan director of education and met with a group of governors and a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I spoke to pupils during their lessons and also met with a group of pupils from key stage 2. I reviewed examples of pupils' work in a range of subjects. You presented information detailing pupils' achievement, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the work of teachers. Documents relating to your work to safeguard pupils were checked. I reviewed the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 68 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 11 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.