

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 May 2018

Mrs Julie Hill
Headteacher
St Godric's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Thornley
Thornley Road
Wheatley Hill
Durham
DH6 3NR

Dear Mrs Hill

Short inspection of St Godric's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Thornley

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 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 February 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since taking up your position as acting headteacher in September 2017, you have provided clear and supportive leadership. You have overseen a period of significant transition, with three new teachers joining the teaching staff in September 2017. You and your team have provided effective support and guidance to these new colleagues, two of whom are relatively new to the profession. With your team, you have clearly identified strengths and areas for improvement and established a shared commitment to continually improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have cultivated a strong team ethos in which staff at all levels show a collective purpose in improving outcomes and providing a caring environment for all pupils.

You have developed an accurate and honest picture of current performance. You have established partnerships with local schools to improve practice and the accuracy of assessment. Your colleagues have worked with advisers from the local authority to refine their classroom practice. Your mathematics subject leader has joined a teacher research group to develop her expertise in the new curriculum. She has shared resources and new approaches with colleagues and is beginning to monitor the impact. There are signs that these approaches are leading to improving

outcomes for pupils, particularly at the end of key stage 2. You are giving subject leaders increasing responsibility for leading improvement, although they are less experienced in measuring the effect of improvement strategies. In addition, you have reviewed phonics teaching to address some dips in recent outcomes, particularly for boys. Your early years leader is overseeing developments in phonics teaching across key stage 1, and an increased proportion of pupils are on course to reach required standards in 2018. These actions reflect your commitment to ongoing improvement and your capacity to provide support and stability during this period of change.

New staff members are appreciative of the 'fantastic' support they have received from colleagues across the school. They have valued opportunities to observe good practice, develop classroom management skills and engage in ongoing discussions on planning and assessment with their peers. Significantly, they also value the social and emotional support for their wider well-being.

The caring ethos you have established extends across the school. In October 2017, you were recognised as a Rights respecting School. In discussions, pupils demonstrated a clear awareness of their rights and their responsibilities. They expressed their views with confidence and maturity and value the respectful and calm atmosphere cultivated by school leaders.

In recent years, there has been some variability in pupils' outcomes across key stages. At key stage 2, pupils have typically made good progress in reading and writing, although their progress in writing has not been as strong. In contrast, pupils have made weaker progress at key stage 1, and the proportion of pupils meeting the required standard in the phonics screening check has been more variable. In the early years, there have been signs of continued improvement, with increasing proportions achieving a good level of development. However, this improving trend is not built on rapidly enough at key stage 1.

At the last inspection, leaders were advised to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress and attainment and to speed up rates of pupils' progress in writing. There is evidence that improving teaching has supported good progress at the end of key stage 2, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, teaching over time has contributed to more variable outcomes at key stage 1. In addition, actions have not yet resulted in consistent rates of improvement in writing, and boys continue to make much weaker progress than girls. Leaders are aware of this and have revised strategies in place. However, the implementation of these strategies is at an early stage, and current progress remains variable.

The governing body is also undergoing a period of change, with new governors taking up responsibilities for key areas. Governors have completed an audit of their skills and are currently recruiting and realigning roles to take account of governors' skills and interests. In some cases, governor monitoring roles are not fully developed, and this means that leaders are not benefiting from the support and challenge needed at this time of change.

Safeguarding is effective

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The headteacher recently commissioned a local authority review of safeguarding practice to check that policies and procedures meet requirements. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. They ensure that staff receive up-to-date training on safeguarding issues. Leaders pursue concerns over pupils' welfare vigorously and record them thoroughly.

In meetings, pupils said that they feel safe in school, and the vast majority of their parents and carers agree. Many parents commented on the high standards of care and support provided by staff at the school. Pupils believe that bullying is rare and teachers are good at resolving any instances of bullying. Pupils showed a strong understanding of their rights and responsibilities, reflecting the recognition of the school as a Rights Respecting School in October 2017. Pupils showed an awareness of how to stay safe online and on the roads.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' progress at key stage 1 has been more variable than at key stage 2, and outcomes in 2017 were weaker than in 2016. Boys' progress in reading and writing has been much weaker. In addition, outcomes in the phonics screening check showed a decline in 2017. Leaders are aware of this and have already reviewed phonics training, providing training and support that is contributing to improving outcomes for current pupils. Current progress information suggests stronger outcomes in 2018. However, some of the developments to increase challenge remain at an early stage, and work in books shows that variance continues.
- Over time, pupils have made good progress in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics increased and was above that seen nationally. The current progress of pupils is not quite as strong, mainly as pupils' progress in writing continues to lag behind that in reading and mathematics. Leaders and teachers are working to provide more stimulating writing tasks and develop pupils' ability to write more confidently and expressively in a range of styles. The impact of these approaches is not yet consistently evident.
- Over time, disadvantaged pupils have made variable progress at key stage 2. In 2017, an increased proportion achieved expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined. Leaders are aware of the needs of disadvantaged pupils and provide support for language development. They also provide social and emotional support, such as the weekly provision of a school counsellor. While differences are diminishing between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers in mathematics in some year groups, they persist in reading and particularly in writing in others.
- The headteacher and her team have a thorough awareness of the needs of pupils

who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Teachers work closely with parents, pupils and external partners to diagnose needs and put appropriate support in place. Teachers use support plans to provide additional help and to track the effect of support on pupils' progress. Specialist training is provided to develop staff understanding of sensory and emotional needs. The headteacher and her team have developed personalised methods of measuring the progress of individual pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. There is clear evidence that this support helps pupils to engage purposefully with their learning and prepares them for the next stages of their education. A number of parents wrote of the positive impact of this support on their child's confidence, progress and self-esteem.

- Children make good and improving progress in the early years as a result of effective teaching, close assessment and a well-planned and stimulating learning environment. Teachers provide a balance of focused literacy and numeracy, alongside play-based learning that supports positive social and emotional development and the acquisition of key skills. Leaders have worked with external consultants to enhance the learning environment, providing challenges and prompts that encourage children to play and learn in purposeful ways. Children benefit from high levels of care and support and are happy in their learning and play.
- The headteacher has a clear sense of moral purpose that informs the culture of the school and the interactions between pupils and staff. She oversees a calm and respectful learning environment. The school building is clean, tidy and well resourced, as she believes that pupils are entitled to a conducive learning environment. Leaders have secured good levels of attendance, as pupils find school a welcoming environment. Leaders have shown much success in improving attendance for pupils who previously had higher rates of absence. Pupils appreciate this respectful atmosphere.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the quality of teaching at key stage 1, including the teaching of phonics, to enable pupils to make stronger progress
- intensify actions to accelerate pupils' progress in writing, particularly for boys
- improve the progress that disadvantaged pupils make by closely checking the effect of teaching and new initiatives and the use of additional funding
- further develop the roles of subject leaders to heighten leadership capacity and to enable them to measure the effectiveness of improvement strategies
- develop governor monitoring roles to enable them to provide more focused support and challenge for school leaders, particularly at this time of change.

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 Durham. This letter will be published on the

Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored the actions taken by leaders to improve pupils' progress at key stage 1. I also explored progress at key stage 2. In addition, I looked at the provision and progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. I also explored the progress made by children in the early years.

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also spoke with four members of the governing body, including the chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and discussed pupils' learning with them in lessons. I met the educational development partner from the local authority. I looked with you at learning in lessons and I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined school improvement priorities and looked at other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records and assessment information. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 24 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 15 free-text responses from parents.