

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Dominic Brown  
Headteacher  
St Chad's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School  
The Baltic  
Witton Park  
Bishop Auckland  
County Durham  
DL14 0EP

Dear Mr Brown

### **Short inspection of St Chad's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 September 2014.

#### **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 your team have sustained effective standards of teaching and learning that have contributed to good and improving outcomes for pupils. Your team has developed a supportive and inclusive ethos and demonstrated a shared commitment to pupils' well-being. Your leadership strengths have been recognised in the support that you and your deputy headteacher have provided for leaders and teachers at other schools.

You and your team have responded well to the demands of the new national curriculum. At key stage 1 in 2017, pupils achieved results that were in the top 10% of schools nationally. In addition, a high proportion of pupils met the required standard in the phonics screening check. Your team prepared pupils well for new assessment demands at key stage 2, with pupils making good and improving progress in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress in writing was weaker, particularly for boys and for disadvantaged pupils. Current progress information shows that pupils are continuing to make good progress, although differences remain in the proportions of boys and disadvantaged pupils reaching greater depths of understanding.

You have addressed a number of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Improvements in the quality of teaching have led to improving outcomes, particularly at key stage 1. However, your actions to improve the quality

of pupils' writing have not been as consistently effective. You have developed the wider leadership of your team. Your acting deputy headteacher has ably accepted new leadership responsibilities after her predecessor was recruited to provide support at a local school. She is leading strategies to improve the quality of pupils' writing and introducing initiatives to broaden pupils' awareness of equalities and wider social issues. Your team works with an increasingly larger circle of colleagues from local schools to share best practice and to check the accuracy of their assessment of the standards of pupils' work. Convincing leadership in areas such as the early years and for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is improving the quality of provision and pupils' progress.

You and your team have completed honest and largely accurate self-evaluation. They have a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, particularly the challenge to improve standards in writing and increase the proportions of pupils who work at greater depth. Your team reviews pupils' progress at regular intervals and plans interventions and additional support to address any areas of underachievement. These actions have contributed to improving progress in recent years.

You and your team have developed a distinctive ethos where pupils are proud of their school community and eager to discover more about the wider world beyond. Your team provides extensive experiences to widen the perspectives of pupils. Pupils have opportunities to engage with other faiths, for example through visits to a synagogue. You do not shy away from topical issues in your 'pupil vote' activities and show courage in enabling pupils to talk about challenging topics, such as acts of terrorism or the ethics of conflict. Pupils show social and environmental responsibility in their engagement with residents of an old people's home, their charity work for a local hospice and their actions to reduce the unnecessary use of plastic. You enable pupils to develop their self-confidence and articulacy by engaging with outside speakers, including a recent Skype conference with the Speaker of the House of Commons. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 talked eloquently about whether it was right or wrong to build tourist developments in the rainforest.

Your 'educate and celebrate' programme is often inspiring in your team's work to promote pupils' understanding of a wide range of equalities, including race, religion and disability. You have developed pupils' awareness of different family structures and sexual orientation in age-appropriate ways through discussion and by studying texts which address these issues in thoughtful and engaging ways. In discussion, pupils showed a deep understanding of the school's values of tolerance by sharing the school invitation to 'come as you are and walk with us' as 'love has no labels'. Leaders and teachers espouse, with pupils, the school's values grounded in faith and the relationship between the school's ethos and wider society. The school has forged good links with parents and the community. The vast majority of parents agree with their children that standards of care and support are strong. One parent reflected the views of many in writing: 'All the staff know the children well and take an interest in them and assist their personalities to grow. The staff work hard to ensure the school is the best it can be.'

Governors share your sense of moral purpose. They are committed to the ethos and values of the school. They are kept up to date on pupils' progress and welfare through regular reports provided by the headteacher. Governors also attend training with the local authority to develop their understanding of their monitoring responsibilities. In some areas, their monitoring roles are not sufficiently defined to enable them to provide appropriate levels of challenge and support.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. Leaders and teaching staff know pupils well and pursue concerns over pupils' safety vigorously and record them thoroughly. Leaders keep staff up to date with safeguarding training and all staff are trained in the government's 'Prevent' duty. A governor has recently carried out a review of health and safety on the school site, although governors' monitoring responsibilities in this area are not fully defined.

Leaders work closely with pupils to develop their understanding of safety and welfare and the actions they can take to keep themselves safe. Pupils demonstrated a strong understanding of the actions they can take to avoid the potential threats they can face online. In addition, pupils have participated in assemblies with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to make them aware of potential threats to their welfare and the actions they can take to protect themselves from harm. All pupils spoken with said they felt safe in school and that they were confident that teachers and adults would effectively resolve any incidents of bullying. The climate of care and the respect for individual differences cultivated by the school team enhances pupils' safety and well-being.

### **Inspection findings**

- You are introducing a range of strategies to improve pupils' progress in writing. These include opportunities for pupils to write for real audiences and purposes, including letters to residents of old people's homes and persuasive writing to local businesses. There is evidence in books of some accomplished writing, with a number of girls displaying a mature control of language and a bold use of vocabulary. On occasions, boys' progress and that of disadvantaged pupils is less developed, as higher standards are not consistently maintained. Current progress information shows that pupils make improving progress, particularly at key stage 1, although new approaches are not consistently implemented across all year groups.
- Leaders and teachers track the progress of disadvantaged pupils through regular reviews. They provide additional small group support to aid the development of pupils' writing. Leaders also provide assistance in cooperation with external partners, such as working with an emotional resilience nurse, to build pupils' self-confidence and learning aptitudes. These initiatives are helping disadvantaged pupils to make improving progress that is better than, or in line with, their peers in the majority of year groups. Differences persist in disadvantaged pupils'

progress in writing and in the proportions reaching greater depths of understanding.

- Your special educational needs coordinator works with colleagues to diagnose the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and to put appropriate support in place to aid their progress. She has developed effective partnerships with external specialists in areas such as social and communication skills and occupational therapy and used their expertise to train her own team. This has contributed to activities such as the lunchtime movement sessions to develop pupils' coordination and motor skills. She reviews the effect of support at regular intervals and actively seeks the involvement of parents in reviewing progress. Although smaller proportions of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are reaching age-related expectations, the majority are making good progress from their starting points.
- Your administration officer is working closely with your parental support adviser to track pupils' attendance more closely. They have developed a stronger focus on pupils at risk of lower attendance. There has been more active engagement and support with parents that has supported improvements for individual pupils. Where parents have not engaged with your efforts to provide support, fixed-term penalty notices have recently been issued. Your team is raising the importance of attendance with parents, but strategies are having mixed success as overall rates of absence and persistent absence are higher this year than last year.
- Leaders and teachers have secured good and improving outcomes in the early years in recent years. Increasing proportions of children have reached a good level of development and achieved outcomes above those seen nationally. Leaders have an accurate view of standards and this was verified by local authority moderators in 2017. At key stage 1, pupils attain well, achieving standards that were in the top 10% of schools nationally in 2017. Teachers and leaders have a good awareness of areas for improvement and are engaging in strategies to increase pupils' writing stamina. Current progress information and work in books show that pupils are continuing to make good progress at key stage 1.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further develop strategies to improve the quality of pupils' writing, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils
- increase opportunities, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils, to work at greater depths of understanding
- intensify actions to improve rates of attendance for pupils
- refine the monitoring responsibilities of governors to strengthen their ability to provide appropriate support and challenge.

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 looked at the actions teachers and leaders were taking to improve pupils' progress in writing. I also looked at the work teachers and leaders were carrying out to support provision and progress for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. I explored whether good outcomes were being sustained in the early years and at key stage 1. I also investigated the effect of actions to improve pupils' attendance.

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also spoke with three 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 senior 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 considered 22 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 17 free-text responses from parents. I also considered four responses to the pupil questionnaire and seven responses to the staff questionnaire.