

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr John Rushton  
Headteacher  
St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School Wigan  
Thorburn Road  
Norley Hall  
Wigan  
Lancashire  
WN5 9LW

Dear Mr Rushton

### **Short inspection of St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School Wigan**

Following my visit to the school on 27 November 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 March 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. St Cuthbert's is an orderly and purposeful school, where pupils attend regularly and enjoy learning. During your short tenure, you have identified several priorities, which you are systematically solving to ensure that the school continually improves. Together with senior leaders, you are moving the school forward. For example, you have strengthened the role of middle leaders and improved pupils' reading. Progress is good across subjects and is especially strong in the Reception classes.

Pupils benefit from an exciting and stimulating curriculum. Those I spoke with said they enjoy mathematical challenges and investigative activities in science. Pupils' writing is improving because they regularly practise and refine their skills across the curriculum. This is evident in pupils' topic work, which explores a wide range of subjects including the Vikings, Victorian England, and in thoughtful, well-written accounts of life during the First World War. Pupils enjoy visiting museums and local places of interest and recounting their outdoor pursuits, which take place in the Lake District.

Staff morale is high. This was evident when I spoke with middle leaders. Typically, they indicated their appreciation of opportunities to share their subject knowledge with colleagues, both within school and through the many partnerships they have with other schools. Staff who completed the inspection survey are unanimous in their view that the school has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is

good. Teachers know what the school is trying to achieve and say that professional training and development helps to improve their teaching practice and leadership skills.

Together with senior leaders, you have maintained good relationships with parents and carers. Those I spoke with said they are happy with their children's progress. Parents are of the view that the school is a safe place for their children to learn. Almost all are of the view that pupils' behaviour, and communication with the school, are good. The many text messages which I received were overwhelmingly positive, as were the letters I read. Parents comment, 'This is a great school, staff keep us up to date...the new headteacher is doing a great job' and 'St Cuthbert's is an inclusive school where staff work very hard.'

Parents were eager to tell me that they are appreciative of before- and after-school provision. The excellent partnership that the school has with the adjacent pre-school service, which includes a nursery and toddler group, helps children get off to a good start when they enter the Reception classes.

You have resolved most of the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. Most notably, you have developed the role of middle leaders, who are now more consistently involved in improving the quality of teaching. In addition, senior leaders have improved pupils' attendance, which is currently above average. Historic national data indicates that your work to improve pupils' progress has been successful, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Other areas we discussed, which require attention, relate to your system to collect data and information on the prior performance of different groups of pupils. This is an area that is currently in a state of flux, as you are reviewing and developing your systems to manage data more efficiently. Currently, senior leaders do not collate information on progress systematically, or routinely use information to check on the effectiveness of teaching in ensuring that pupils make enough progress

We also discussed e-safety as an area for development. This is because younger pupils, especially those in key stage 1, do not have a good enough understanding of how to keep safe when using electronic means of communication. Of those I spoke with, too few had the level of knowledge and understanding needed to help them surf the internet safely. You have placed this matter high on your agenda of improvement priorities. This is evident, as you have recently revised the school's e-safety policy. Useful e-safety links are available on the school website and plans have been drawn up to develop staff, pupil and parents' awareness in this area further.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

- All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders ensure that all staff are trained effectively and that safeguarding records are current and accurate. All checks are made on staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. Designated safeguarding

leaders are trained to a high standard. All staff know how to spot signs of neglect and/or abuse.

- The safeguarding policy is current and available on the school's website. Staff are familiar with the school's policies and government guidelines, including the latest guidance on keeping children safe in education.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school. Older pupils have a good understanding of the potential dangers of using electronic means of communication, including the internet and mobile phones. Younger pupils' knowledge is less secure. Leaders are fully aware of this and are taking appropriate action to improve pupils' understanding in this area. Pupils are adamant that there is little or no bullying in school. Their understanding of different forms of discrimination, such as racism, is developing, as is their appreciation of the harmful effects of treating people unfairly because of their sexuality.
- Pupils trust staff and have strong bonds with them. This helps to ensure pupils' confidence to disclose any concerns they may have. Staff understand the potential dangers vulnerable pupils face and there is a positive culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders work effectively with parents and outside agencies to keep pupils safe and secure.

## **Inspection findings**

- My first line of enquiry related to the effectiveness of subject leaders. Since your tenure, which began in September this year, you have made it a priority to enhance leaders' roles. Those who I met formed a very cohesive team. It emerged from the discussion that leaders are directly involved in assessing the quality of teaching through carrying out observations of colleagues practice. In addition, leaders of subjects including English, mathematics, science, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE) regularly scrutinise pupils' workbooks. This provides them with a good indication of pupils' current progress in various subjects.
- Subject leaders are trained effectively, not only in relation to their subject responsibilities, but regarding their leadership roles. Leaders share their assessments of pupils' work with colleges in their partner schools. This provides a benchmark for establishing the accuracy of teachers' evaluations of pupils' performance. Specialist training has helped to improve the teaching of mathematics, which has contributed to the recent improvement in the standards attained by the most able pupils. Similarly, good training, advice and support helped to ensure that at the end of Year 6 in 2018, an above-average proportion of pupils attained at the higher standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- My next line of enquiry focused on phonics. I wanted to examine this area, because although the proportion of pupils secure in their phonic skills and knowledge at the national check at the end of Year 1 has improved over several years, it was below average in 2018. During the inspection I observed several phonics groups, comprised of Year 1 pupils and children in the Reception classes.
- Phonics is taught systematically, focusing on meeting the needs of pupils with a

wide range of abilities. I observed pupils sounding out various words, reading and writing. Year 1 pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who found it difficult to write simple three- and four-letter words were exceptionally well supported and engaged in learning. The teaching of phonics starts in the Reception class. Teacher's high expectations challenge the most able children. After learning the 'oo' sound children were able to write sentences such as 'I went to the moon' and 'She went to the zoo.' Your effective approach to teaching phonics is improving pupils' reading skills. Of the pupils I heard read, those who found reading difficult used their phonic skills well to sound out and read unfamiliar words. Older pupils are making good progress in reading. They are becoming fluent readers and extending their reading repertoire.

- My third line of enquiry centred on your work to increase the proportion of pupils attaining highly in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects. I wanted to focus on this area because, while historically pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 has been good, attainment at the higher standards has been low in some areas. For example, at the end of Year 6 in 2018, a below-average proportion of pupils attained at the higher standard in reading and mathematics.
- You have taken effective action to ensure that more pupils are attaining the higher standards. Pupils are being challenged more regularly in mathematics, and this is evident in work seen in pupils' books. It was also evident in a Year 6 class, where pupils engaged in increasingly difficult long-division calculations. The most able pupils said that they found the work challenging, because they had to show their working out and complete the calculations with speed and precision. Activities successfully developed pupils' fluency in mathematics, providing them with the necessary foundations upon which to build more complex problem-solving skills.
- Across both key stages 1 and 2, pupils' English and science books and topic work show good evidence that teachers are developing pupils' writing skills effectively. Thought-provoking teaching in English is helping to create competent writers. This was evident in a Year 4 class. After watching a dramatic David Attenborough-narrated natural history clip, featuring a lizard being chased by snakes and running for its life, pupils were asked to create their own dramatic piece of writing. They were encouraged to use adventurous adverbs, such as 'valiantly' and 'courageously', and vary their use of pronouns, to add even more tension to their stories. Pupils' resulting work was both powerful and thoroughly engaging.
- My final line of enquiry related to pupils' attendance. Historic data indicates that for several years, pupils' attendance had been below average. In addition, persistent absences had been well above average. You are taking an uncompromising approach to ensuring that parents and pupils are fully aware of the importance of good attendance and punctuality to good learning. Improvements show this message is being heard.
- The highly effective work of your mentors, senior leaders and the specialist external support you draw on have turned the tide regarding attendance. At the end of the academic year in 2018, attendance was close to average, and so far

this term it is good. Your regular monitoring shows that no group of pupils is adversely affected by poor attendance. Your celebration of good attendance, and the competition created between classes and teams, has had a positive impact on reducing absence.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- information on the performance of different groups of pupils is collated and analysed, to check teachers' effectiveness in ensuring that pupils make enough progress
- all pupils, particularly those in key stage 1, have a good understanding of issues such as internet safety and cyber bullying.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lenford White  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders. I also met with other leaders, including those responsible for mathematics, English and science. We visited classes across the school. In addition, I observed various phonics sessions in the Reception and Year 1 classes. I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the archdiocese and a headteacher from a local school.

I had a discussion with a random sample of pupils. I also listened to pupils read and held a discussion with two governors, including chair of the governing body. I examined various documents, including action plans for English and mathematics and for the use of the pupil premium funding, alongside data on pupils' performance. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and looked at policies, including those for behaviour, safeguarding and the curriculum.

I took account of parents' views at the start of the school day. I also considered 38 free-text messages from parents and 53 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I scrutinised 26 responses to the staff questionnaire.