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Mrs Jennifer Gill
Headteacher
St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Stanley Street
Consett
County Durham
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Dear Mrs Gill

Short inspection of St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Consett

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2019, 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 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 have created a hard-working and dedicated team who want to do their best for the children in their care and who aspire to the same level of excellence as you. Staff who contributed to the online questionnaire were unanimous in their belief that the school has continued to improve since the last inspection. Parents have confidence in your calm, clear-sighted leadership.

You and your deputy headteacher work extremely well together and, supported by effective middle leaders, you continue to build on the strengths of the school. For example, you have adapted the way you teach younger children to read to raise their attainment, which is already above the national average. Equally, weaknesses are promptly identified and dealt with systematically. You and your team monitor pupils' progress regularly, acting swiftly if there is any dip in performance. You also make thorough checks when implementing new ways of teaching so that staff receive the right support to ensure that implementation is successful and makes a difference to pupils' learning.

Mutual respect is at the heart of the happy, family atmosphere you and your team have created. All staff feel extremely well supported by you. You have a perceptive understanding of each individual's unique qualities. This, allied with a deep knowledge of effective teaching, means that professional development and training is precisely targeted to offer the most effective level of support. Less experienced staff are mentored by those who are more experienced. After initial training to develop their phonics

knowledge, teaching assistants have been regularly supported by the English leader to improve further.

Since the previous inspection you and your team have focused on the areas identified for improvement. You were asked to improve pupils' progress in writing and to share good practice more widely. The latter has become integral to the way staff work and develop their teaching. It is a highly valued aspect of school life, contributing to staff well-being. Improvements have also been made to the progress pupils make in writing, although staff changes have meant that further work is still being undertaken. A clearly structured approach to teaching writing has ensured that pupils now make more consistently strong progress. Older pupils are required to edit their work and this prompts them to enhance their writing well. The English subject leader has identified that pupils still need to widen their vocabulary and use more adventurous language in their written work. These developments are already under way but are not yet consistently applied across the school.

You are supported effectively by a knowledgeable governing body. Governors have a strong commitment to ensuring that the pupils achieve as well as possible and become responsible, self-confident individuals. They are determined that what one governor termed a 'positive vibe' is at the heart of everything the school does. Governors are keen to develop their own expertise further and attend appropriate training to do so. They maintain a good level of challenge to you and other leaders through their questioning and persistence to ensure that they fully understand what difference has been made in school. For example, they have satisfied themselves that pupil premium funding is used well by interrogating a wide range of information in addition to that published from statutory assessments and tests.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You place a high priority on making certain that pupils are safeguarded at all times and that staff maintain their vigilance. A number of staff have undertaken additional training so that there is always someone in school with the expertise to deal with any concerns. All staff receive appropriate training and regular updates so that they are confident about what they should do to maintain pupils' safety. You work well with other agencies and are persistent when you need to be to keep pupils' safe. Suitable arrangements are in place to recruit staff. Governors commission an annual audit of safeguarding arrangements and check that any actions which arise from it are dealt with.

Parents agree that pupils are safe in school. The very good, trusting relationships between pupils and staff mean that pupils say that there is always someone to talk to. The support you provide to ensure pupils' welfare is a notable feature of the school. For example, staff are trained to support pupils in the well-being zones at playtimes and lunchtimes. These quiet spaces provide a refuge from the noise and bustle of the busy playground for those who need it.

Pupils behave very well. They are attentive in class and well occupied in the playground. Many older pupils support their peers to play games, which enhances their collaboration

and cooperation. Pupils say that staff deal promptly with rare instances of poor behaviour. Pupils have a good understanding of bullying but say that it rarely happens in school. School records confirm this view.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- You and your team were extremely disappointed that pupils' progress in reading in key stage 2 was below the national average in 2018. You and the English leader quickly identified the reasons for this and have taken prompt steps to improve the teaching of reading. You have introduced different schemes to encourage and motivate pupils to read more widely. You have implemented a more structured approach to teaching comprehension skills. This approach has deepened staff knowledge and enabled them to target their teaching more precisely. Pupils' progress is accelerating. These developments are at an early stage and not yet fully developed throughout the school. In some classes, pupils read texts and are asked questions which are not demanding enough to stretch them. This is particularly the case for pupils who are capable of achieving the higher standards. You are aware that pupils have struggled to comprehend texts because they did not understand some of the vocabulary used. In response, you have recently introduced a new approach to teaching other subjects, which includes reading a wider range of books. However, opportunities to read and hear these books are not yet consistent throughout the school.
- Progress in mathematics in key stage 2 was also disappointing in 2018. You and your team had already identified this as an area for further development and have begun to develop teaching to enable pupils to think more deeply about their mathematics and to tackle more complex problems. The work scrutiny you and I conducted confirmed that pupils now undertake tasks which challenges them to think more deeply more regularly. However, this is not consistent across the school and progress is not yet strong in every class.
- The work scrutiny and observation you and I conducted confirmed your view that children in the early years achieve well. Adults ask probing questions as they play with children and this develops their mathematical understanding well. However, they are sometimes taught new concepts too quickly and are not given enough time to fully understand the mathematics they are learning.
- I was keen to find out how well you use pupil premium funding because the progress disadvantaged pupils made in key stage 2 in 2018 was not as strong as in the previous two years. You have appointed an experienced and effective member of staff to take responsibility for this group of pupils. With the support of the deputy headteacher she has undertaken a thorough analysis of the needs of each pupil. Appropriate, well-considered actions are under way to accelerate disadvantaged pupils' progress and overcome any difficulties individuals may experience. A small group of these pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support to progress in mathematics. All actions are frequently checked to ensure that they are making a difference and, as a result of the well-targeted work, a

much higher proportion of pupils are now working at a standard appropriate for their age.

- Careful, regular procedures to check and follow up absence has resulted in the attendance of disadvantaged group of pupils improving. No pupils are now absent persistently.
- The final aspect of the school's work I was keen to explore was the difference middle leaders make to the quality of teaching and to pupils' progress. You have supported the development of middle leaders very well and they are now driving improvements in their areas of responsibility very effectively. They seek out relevant research to inform their plan. Staff appreciate the ongoing support they receive to improve their teaching. Middle leaders know what works well and what needs to be developed. They are fully involved in monitoring the work of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils of all abilities undertake tasks that consistently challenge them to think deeply about their learning in mathematics
- children in the early years are given the time needed to understand new concepts, including what they are learning in mathematics
- in all classes, pupils, especially the most able, are provided with more opportunities to read demanding texts from a broader range of books so that they widen their vocabulary and use more adventurous language in their written work
- teachers ask more thought-provoking questions to further develop pupils' reading comprehension skills.

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

Susan Waugh
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the deputy headteacher and groups of staff. I visited classes alongside you and the deputy headteacher. You and I scrutinised mathematics work. I met with the leader for English and we scrutinised pupils' reading records. I also held a discussion with the leader for pupil premium. I met with a group of three governors and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils about their views of the school, including their views of pupils' behaviour. Some pupils read to me. I considered the 109 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered 29 responses from the online staff survey and one written response from a member of staff. Various documents were considered relating to safeguarding, teaching and governance. I examined the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. I also scrutinised pupils' recent achievements in statutory assessments and I looked at the school's website.