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11 February 2019

Mr Michael Ewing
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Dear Mr Ewing

Short inspection of St Catherine's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school serves a diverse community near the heart of the city. You celebrate this diversity by actively promoting a strong Christian ethos and a culture of equality, which allows every pupil to 'let their light shine'. All staff have high expectations for pupils. Pupils, in turn, respond well, greatly enjoy their learning and strive to do their best.

This is a school which places importance on the care of its most vulnerable children. Parents and carers describe the school as a place of nurture where staff know their pupils and families very well. Through this personal approach and high standards of care and safety, parents say it feels like 'a family' or 'a village primary close to the city centre'.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to raise attainment in phonics. The teaching of reading is now a strength. Improvements made to the provision in early years and the teaching of phonics overall have led to improved outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Teachers and support staff are well trained and knowledgeable. This allows staff to target pupils who require intensive support, including some of those pupils who have recently joined the school and speak English as an additional language (EAL). The use of well-chosen class novels underpins the teaching of reading and helps pupils to further develop their reading skills across key stages 1 and 2. By the end of key stage 2, the progress pupils make in their reading is significant and equates to the top 10% of pupils nationally.

Despite this, some pupils who speak English as an additional language do not always do as well as other pupils in their reading by the end of key stage 2. Leaders are aware of this and plans are in place to ensure further improvements.

At the previous inspection, leaders were also asked to accelerate children's progress in literacy and numeracy in the Reception class. Teachers' knowledge of the assessment system has improved so that the different needs of children are taken into account when planning learning activities. In a phonics lesson, whole-group teaching allowed the teacher to assess which children needed further support. These children then formed a small group led by the teacher which allowed them to practise the 'sh' sound with repetition so that they became more confident. As a result of actions taken by leaders, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is rising and has been above the national average for the last three years.

The development of the curriculum, to ensure that it is broad and balanced, has also been a priority for leaders and governors. This has been successful. Pupils say lessons are exciting and there are many and varied opportunities for them to extend their learning. The school benefits from excellent sports and arts facilities and provides a wide range of extra-curricular clubs. The introduction of the forest school opportunity is a new development, which pupils, staff and parents talk excitedly about. They are confident that it allows links from pupils' learning in the classroom to be extended and to become embedded through the various adventurous activities that take place. For instance, pupils talked about a mini-beast hunt, which used their science knowledge and den-building skills. This also enabled pupils to apply their creative, design and teamwork skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders are committed to promoting pupils' welfare. The safeguarding policy is comprehensive. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and updates. Consequently, everyone knows how to report any concerns. Staff show determination and patience in pursuing the best outcomes for children when working with outside agencies.

Pupils are taught to understand the risks outside of school and how to manage them in a safe way. Pupils know how to stay safe online and recognise the importance of a healthy diet. They are proud of their vegetarian school meals options.

Learning about issues of equality, mutual respect and care for one another has high priority in the school. Incidents of poor behaviour and bullying are rare. Pupils said that when bullying does occur, staff take swift action. Pupils are polite and helpful to one another and they say the school 'is a peaceful place'.

Inspection findings

- The quality of teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Teachers plan lessons which encourage pupils to explore and think deeply about their own learning. For example, in early years, children play cooperatively while learning and exploring in the outside area. In one activity, children were delighting in blowing bubbles. With adult intervention, children were counting and recording the number of bubbles they blew and popped. As a result, children improved their writing and mathematics skills. Older pupils, in a Year 5 English lesson, worked expertly together to comment on and improve each other's work. In this lesson, they referred independently to writing toolkits for support. Effective teacher questioning challenged them to justify and explain their advice, which deepened knowledge and understanding particularly for the most able pupils.
- Changes made by middle leaders to the science curriculum have resulted in professional development opportunities for teachers. This has improved teachers' confidence to plan investigations and exciting practical science lessons. During the inspection, pupils in Year 6 were amazed by the dissection of a lamb's heart. Work in pupils' science books shows that they make the most of opportunities to apply their extended writing skills in a science context and take pride in the quality of their presentation. However, pupils' outcomes in science over time, at key stage 1, are variable. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment is lower than the national average. Leaders are aware that more work needs to be done to ensure that teachers carefully plan the science subject knowledge content of lessons so that pupils can demonstrate their science understanding when they are assessed.
- Previously, pupils' attendance was below the national average. Leaders are working more closely with parents to ensure that some groups of pupils, particularly boys and pupils who speak English as an additional language, attend school more regularly. As a result, pupils' current attendance is in line with the national average and the number of pupils who are regularly absent from school is reducing. Although there has been some success, more time is needed to see the long-term effect of these new procedures.
- Leaders have also been making changes to the curriculum to allow more opportunities for pupils to practise their reading and writing skills across the wider curriculum. In a Year 4 lesson, pupils were reading a class novel linked to their history learning about the Romans. Capitalising on the pupils' interest in finding out if the Romans really were invincible, effective questioning by the teacher probed their understanding of vocabulary. In another lesson, younger pupils were practising skills of inference from a book linked to their learning in science about the environment. There were squeals of delight as pupils turned the pages of 'The Kapok Tree' and eagerly read the text to check if the predictions they had made were correct. The actions leaders have taken have led to pupils being fully engaged in their learning. Pupils demonstrate how the deepening of their English knowledge is being enhanced by their enjoyment of well-planned, cross-curricular lessons.
- Governors are fully engaged in the life of the school. They make frequent visits, which help them form a very clear picture of the school's strengths and

weaknesses. A previous priority for the school had been to raise achievement of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Governors challenge leaders to use the funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, as a result of the effective use of resources, by the end of key stage 2, disadvantaged pupils made better progress than other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics last year.

- Parents greatly appreciate that their children are known and valued as individuals. They are very supportive and say that their children are happy to come to school. Those parents spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. Comments included, 'St Catherine's has a lovely sense of community and the children are all seen as individuals and treated so.' Another parent said, 'The school has a wonderful staff including the support workers and is led by a strong and caring headteacher who knows each child.' One parent summarised the sentiments of many others in saying, 'I am delighted my daughter is lucky enough to go to this school.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements in overall attendance are sustained and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent continues to decline, particularly for boys and pupils who speak English as an additional language
- the teaching of science is further improved so that pupils' progress and attainment in science matches that seen in reading, writing and mathematics
- pupils who speak English as an additional language make progress that is in line with other pupils nationally whose starting points are similar.

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 Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Colin Lofthouse
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and the deputy headteacher. I met with representatives of the governing body and spoke to a local authority representative. I met with the school business manager who deals with recruitment and safeguarding procedures. I scrutinised the single central record of checks which are required for anyone working with children. I looked at a range of

information about pupils' outcomes, attendance, behaviour and safety. I also scrutinised self-evaluation documents and the school improvement plan. I met with middle leaders for reading, writing, personal, social and health education, mathematics, science and humanities. You accompanied me on visits to all lessons, Nursery to Year 6. I talked to your parent support adviser and members of the support staff. I listened to Year 2 and Year 3 pupils who speak English as an additional language read and looked at their reading records. I talked to a range of pupils about their learning and experiences. I looked at pupils' work, particularly their science, reading and wider curriculum books. I took account of the 20 responses from parents to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, and the 17 free-text comments. I also considered the 11 responses to the Ofsted's staff survey.