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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Joanne Cruise
Headteacher
St Pius X Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Thornfield Road
The Grove
Consett
County Durham
DH8 8AX

Dear Mrs Cruise

Short inspection of St Pius X Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 June 2015.

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 the governors have a very clear vision and sense of purpose. You believe 'every child belongs somewhere', and have therefore developed an inclusive approach, with a reputation for high-quality provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Parents and carers who spoke to me, or made their views known through Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, praised the school's warmth, family atmosphere and caring ethos. They also said that your leadership has been instrumental in setting the positive tone that permeates the school. Parents feel that you are always accessible and that you and your staff 'bend over backwards to meet every child's needs'. Pupils told me that they feel safe and secure at school. They say that pupils behave well and that there is little or no bullying. Overall attendance has been sustained above the national average for the last three years.

Following the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching and to ensure that your most able pupils were challenged sufficiently. Since then, there have been some changes to the teaching staff and some more recently appointed teachers are being helped to deliver learning in line with your expectations. You have ensured that your teachers and teaching assistants receive appropriate training and professional development opportunities. During the visits

we made to each class, it was clear that your teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully. Most teachers ensure that the activities they provide are adapted for pupils of different ages and with different starting points. A positive feature of the teaching we observed was the effective teamwork by the adults in most classrooms. Most teachers deploy their classroom assistants well, ensuring that extra help is provided for pupils who need it. We noted that the teaching we observed was challenging the most able pupils effectively. However, challenge is an aspect of teaching you know needs to be checked continuously, as no pupils have attained the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in recent years. You know your teachers' strengths and weaknesses well because you often visit classrooms to check on the quality of learning. Consequently, you are providing well-considered support where improvements to teaching can be made. Teachers are well motivated and respond positively where this support is provided.

At the time of the last inspection, you were in the process of introducing a new assessment system, which the inspector asked you to streamline. The system for checking on pupils' progress and attainment is now firmly in place and provides you and the governors with reliable information. You check on the progress of each pupil at three points across the year. You and the governors use this information well. Any pupil identified as making slower progress is quickly given extra help. At the start of each day, teachers ensure that any gaps in pupils' knowledge are revisited. The thoroughness of this approach is clear to see. Last year, for example, every pupil in Year 1 attained the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check, and older pupils performed particularly well in the key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling test. These outcomes reflect your determination to ensure that your pupils establish strong foundations in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they move on to secondary school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your governors have thorough vetting procedures in place to check on adults who work in, or visit, the school. You ensure that all members of staff receive up-to-date safeguarding training and are aware of a broad range of potential risks, including radicalisation and extremism. Your staff fully understand the duty upon them to act if they have any concerns about a child's safety or welfare.

Your records show that you act promptly, in conjunction with external partners, when you identify any concerns about a child's welfare. You are tenacious, and challenge external partners if you feel that actions to protect vulnerable children are being taken too slowly. The school is good at drawing upon the support of other agencies, such as the police, child and adolescent mental health services and the local authority behaviour support team. You also foster strong partnerships with parents, and are prepared to challenge when, for example, their child's attendance falls below expectations.

Inspection findings

- In this inspection, I looked closely at the progress and attainment of current pupils because published data shows that outcomes have been somewhat variable in recent years. In 2018, outcomes were the best the school had seen for three years. The proportion of children attaining a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year was in line with that seen nationally. All the pupils in Year 1 attained the expected standard in the phonics screening check. Standards attained at the end of key stage 1 matched those seen nationally. At the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. As the proportion of pupils in the school with SEND is over twice the national average and rising, this was a positive picture overall.
- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress. Your school development plan has specific targets and actions in place to try to improve standards, particularly at the end of Reception and the end of key stage 2. Your current assessment information indicates that you are on track to see improvements in both areas. As more children are now entering the Reception class with skills that are typical for their age, you have raised expectations and have sharpened the teaching of basic skills in reading, writing and number. There are also more pupils on track to attain the higher standard in the current Year 6 class. Nevertheless, improved outcomes in both areas are yet to be realised.
- Provision for pupils with SEND is a strength of the school. Teachers are skilled in the identification and assessment of pupils' individual barriers to learning and work closely with external specialists to provide tailored and bespoke support. Pupils' support plans have sharply written targets, which are used well by teachers and teaching assistants. Ongoing support in lessons for pupils with SEND is of good quality. Teaching assistants are skilled at keeping pupils engaged and thinking deeply. Pupils are helped to work independently whenever they can. In the focused observations we made, we found pupils with SEND to be making good progress and to be working confidently alongside other pupils.
- Last year, published data showed that pupils in key stage 2 made better progress in mathematics than in English. The sample of English books I looked at on this inspection shows teachers have responded positively. Teachers set high expectations and pupils strive to improve their handwriting and presentation. Pupils' skills in writing have improved considerably across the year. Precise teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar is helping pupils to write with more variety and colour. A new, systematic approach to increasing the time pupils spend reading has been introduced. The early signs are that this approach is improving many pupils' comprehension skills. The effect to date has been greater for lower- and middle-attaining pupils. The English subject leader has rightly recognised that a different or complementary approach may be required to develop more sophisticated reading skills for the most able pupils.
- The governors are passionate about education and share your values. They are knowledgeable and active in school. They are well informed about the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making. Training from the local authority has improved governors' use of assessment information. Consequently,

governors now ask pertinent questions about the progress of different groups of pupils. The governors share your commitment to supporting the learning of pupils with SEND. This can cause problems for them in managing the school's budget, as SEND funding is not always being secured before children with additional needs start at the school. To try to address this, you are working closely with your feeder nursery schools to speed up assessments.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning is consistently strong across the school
- more children attain a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year
- the school's most able pupils are helped to develop higher-order reading skills and that more of them go on to attain the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.

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

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, the subject leader for English, the chair of the governing body and five other governors. I also met with a representative of the local authority and spoke on the telephone to a representative of the diocese. I talked to a group of pupils and listened to some Year 1 pupils read. Together, you and I visited all the classes to look at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. During lesson visits, I checked some pupils' books and talked to some pupils about their learning and progress. The English subject leader and I looked in detail at some pupils' English books. The sample of books selected covered pupils with different starting points across key stages 1 and 2. I looked at the 20 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, assessment information and attendance and exclusions data. I also checked other documents available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the

school, especially in English, and the quality of provision for pupils with SEND. I also considered the breadth and balance of the curriculum, the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.