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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Gerry Kelly
Headteacher
St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Smith Street
Ryhope
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR2 0RQ

Dear Mr Kelly

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

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 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 November 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 know your pupils and their families very well. This cements the strong family ethos that embodies the school. As a result, pupils are thriving and this is a very happy and truly inclusive school.

Your composed and measured leadership ensures that decision-making is well considered. This is borne from an accurate evaluation of the detailed analysis you complete on pupils' assessment information. This means that your self-evaluation is accurate and subsequent improvement priorities are well thought through. You set precise milestones against which you judge the success of your actions. These are reflective of the high aspirations and expectations that you set for pupils' academic and personal success.

You have ensured that classrooms are vibrant learning environments. Strong and highly respectful relationships exist between staff and pupils and pupils and their peers. Lessons are calm and purposeful, and pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning. Staff offer effective guidance and support to pupils and, as a result, pupils continue to make the good achievement identified at the last inspection.

Pupils respond well to your high expectations for good behaviour. They are courteous and polite to each other and to visitors. They are extremely welcoming to those who are new to the school. Their movement around the school is calm and orderly.

Playtimes are lively occasions. The recently redesigned playground is providing pupils with lots to explore and to investigate. For example, for the budding scientist the bug hotel provides ample opportunities for pupils to observe minibeasts that may decide to visit, while the life-size Connect 4 provides challenge to the mathematicians. This is in addition to the fixed climbing frame and the vast array of playground games and resources that are available each day. Although there are very few recorded behaviour incidents at the school, they are all related to incidents at playtime. However, your investment in playground design and equipment has resulted in these incidents reducing further.

Since the last inspection, you have worked hard with staff to ensure that pupils are challenged in their learning. You have invested in high-quality training opportunities to develop a 'mastery' approach to teaching and learning in the school. It is clear that your investment has paid dividend as, during the inspection, pupils were very keen to talk about their learning and experiences. They demonstrated the skills of collaborative learning effectively and were equally skilled in assessing their own and their friends' work, sensibly and accurately.

Governors are committed to the school and use their skills effectively to hold leaders to account. They play a full part in school life. Governors' role in monitoring the work of the school is well established. As a result, they gain a very good understanding of the strengths that exist in the school and the areas for further improvement. Records of their meetings reflect the detailed questioning afforded to you and other leaders, so that further improvements are secured.

Safeguarding is effective.

All appropriate employment checks are completed on anyone wishing to work at the school to ensure that they are fit to do so. Such checks are maintained electronically and are reviewed regularly by the designated safeguarding governor.

All staff receive regular training to ensure that they are up to date with any legislative changes and any local issues that may be important to them. Staff are very clear about the important role they play in keeping pupils safe.

Pupils themselves show an age-appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using the internet. Older pupils were very confident in detailing the precautions that they should take when using social media.

Inspection findings

- One of my first lines of enquiry was to review leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance, which has historically been below the national average. This has been a priority for improvement since the last inspection. During the inspection, I found that pupils' current attendance is much improved and is now very close to the national average. Much has been done to reward those pupils and classes with good attendance, while at the same time ensuring that all parents receive regular newsletters and reminders of the importance of good attendance and punctuality. Leaders have also tightened their procedures for tackling persistent absenteeism. While medical absence accounts for much of the higher rates of absence, leaders don't shy away from issuing penalty notices when required.
- Although in 2018 pupils' progress in reading at the end of key stage 2 had improved upon previous years, I wanted to review the quality of teaching and learning in this subject. Following the weaker outcomes in 2017, leaders changed their approach to the teaching of reading comprehension. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 now receive a discrete comprehension lesson three times a week, where they are taught the skills needed to gain a deeper meaning from texts. They use 'VIPERS' which focuses on improving pupils' understanding of: vocabulary, inference, prediction, explaining, recalling, retrieving and summarising information. Overall, current pupil assessment information, and a review of learning in lessons, would indicate that pupils' progress in reading is improving in all year groups. However, while pupils are clearly benefiting from this new approach, there remains too little emphasis on developing pupils' inference skills.
- As part of leaders' priorities for improving pupils' reading attainment and progress there has been a greater emphasis placed upon widening pupils' vocabulary in a range of subjects. Teachers use subject-specific vocabulary precisely and expect pupils to do the same. While this is bearing fruit, there are few opportunities for pupils to undertake their own research in subjects such as history and geography, and apply their reading skills in a given context.
- Leaders are also focused upon developing pupils' positive attitudes towards reading and encouraging pupils to read for pleasure both at home and school. Class stories are encouraging pupils to read books with different styles and are ensuring that pupils are exposed to stories from both traditional and contemporary authors. Parental workshops have been hugely successful in helping parents to support their children's reading at home. Leaders ensure that those pupils who do not practise their reading at home do so in school.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have been above the national average over time. Catch-up phonics for pupils in Year 2 has been particularly successful, with all pupils reaching the required standard and ready to start Year 3.
- As part of the inspection I wanted to explore what impact additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has had in raising their attainment. Leaders, including governors, acknowledge that relatively small numbers of pupils within these groups can skew published assessment information. Therefore, leaders ensure that from

their varying starting points individual pupils' progress is tracked very carefully. Assessment information is used wisely to inform individual support plans for those pupils who may have additional needs or be falling behind in their learning. Such plans are reviewed and checked by leaders regularly to ensure that the targets set for improvement are the most appropriate. There is a very clear cycle of 'plan, do and review' securely in place. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are making good progress against the targets set for them.

- My final focus for the inspection was to review how effectively children's early literacy skills are developed in the early years. Although the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has been in line with national averages over several years, children's outcomes in the specific area of learning associated with literacy have been slightly lower. The early years leader is very experienced and has a good understanding of how young children learn. She ensures that strong relationships are established quickly so that children are confident and happy in their surroundings. Adult-led activities are very focused and build precisely upon what children already know and can do effectively. However, free-choice activities lack the same level of precision and are more akin to free play rather than enabling children to consolidate their early reading and writing skills effectively. For example, in the construction area children were happily making models, but were not encouraged to look at books for design ideas or label their efforts.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater emphasis placed upon developing pupils' higher-order reading skills of inference, so that pupils can gain deeper understanding of the texts they are studying
- pupils receive increasing opportunities to apply their reading skills to undertake research activities in a range of subjects
- free-choice activities within the early years are used, whenever possible, to consolidate children's early literacy 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 Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator, to discuss aspects of your work. You shared your own evaluations of the effectiveness of the school and your improvement plans. I observed pupils' learning in lessons, together with you, and reviewed work in pupils' books. I reviewed current pupils' assessment information.

I analysed a range of documents including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. I talked to pupils about their learning during lesson observations and at lunchtime. I heard a group of pupils read and talked to them more formally.

I took account of the 62 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's parental inspection questionnaire, including four free-text responses. In addition, I reviewed the results of the pupil and staff surveys. I met with five members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, and met with a representative from the local authority.