

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 November 2017

Mr Lee Duncan
Headteacher
St Mary Magdalen's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Seaham
Dene House Road
Seaham
County Durham
SR7 7BJ

Dear Mr Duncan

Short inspection of St Mary Magdalen's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Seaham

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up post in September 2015, you have communicated your high expectations of staff and pupils effectively. A culture of warmth, inclusivity and good humour prevails in this calm, industrious environment. Staff are proud to work here and they hold leaders in high regard. Pupils behave well indoors and outside, showing friendly consideration towards each other. They told me that they feel happy and safe in school. Pupils find staff to be kind and respectful and to make themselves available if pupils want to talk or have worries. The large majority of parents agree that their children are well looked after and would recommend the school to others.

The previous inspection report challenged you to improve teaching. It urged you to identify and share good teaching practices and monitor performance more closely. You want all pupils to achieve their very best and understand that the quality of teaching and learning is key to this. You have therefore tackled these recommendations with diligence. Together with governors and other leaders, you have developed a thorough monitoring schedule. You examine the quality of teaching, learning and assessment regularly and manage teachers' performance skilfully through open, honest dialogues. Teachers are clear about what they need to do to improve their practice further. Staff value this challenge and support. They appreciate the good-quality professional development opportunities provided.

Leaders' actions are securing better consistency in the quality of teaching across key stages.

Pupils have benefited from the increased knowledge, confidence and skills that staff have acquired as a result of your actions. Pupils' outcomes across key stages have risen. In 2017, a larger proportion of children in early years reached a good level of development than that seen nationally. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stages 1 and 2 also improved to exceed national averages. You are not, however, complacent and acknowledge the need to improve the proportion of pupils, boys in particular, reaching greater depths of learning in writing across each key stage.

Further recommendations in the previous inspection advised you to develop the skills and abilities of subject leaders. Leaders across the curriculum now take ownership of leading and managing developments in their areas of responsibility. They liaise with other leaders, scrutinise pupils' work regularly, deliver staff training sessions and take increasing responsibility for improving teaching and learning. Nonetheless, some subject leaders' improvement plans, including those for English and science, are too vague and lack the detail needed to secure rapid improvement. You agree that subject leaders' action plans need to focus more sharply on pupils' learning and outcomes so that all parties understand precisely what is expected.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Since taking up the position of headteacher, you have evaluated and revised systems for keeping pupils safe. You, governors and staff place an appropriately strong emphasis on pupils' safety and protection. Checks on the suitability of adults working with pupils are fittingly stringent. Teaching staff and governors receive regular updates and training on issues pertaining to the welfare and protection of pupils. You have also tightened record-keeping procedures. This means that adults understand how and to whom they should report any concerns they may have. Work with other agencies and professionals to secure support for vulnerable individuals and families is consistently effective.

You have improved site security, adding electronic entry and exit systems, which pupils told me make them feel protected. Pupils also appreciate the regular safety experiences and opportunities that you organise and implement. Through events such as the 'safety carousel' and, road, fire, water and e-safety work, you ensure that pupils know and understand how to keep themselves safe.

Although such day-to-day practices keep pupils safe, you understand that there is further work to do to improve some elements of practice in this crucial area of responsibility. This is because leaders and governors have not scrutinised all aspects of policy documentation thoroughly enough to ensure that they fully reflect the most up-to-date national guidance. Furthermore, leaders and governors have occasionally not communicated minor changes or the finer details of the most recent statutory directives to all adults, particularly those who have non-teaching

roles. You agreed with my findings and took immediate action to rectify some of the issues identified during this inspection.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength. Pupils enjoy school. Consistently higher than national rates of attendance testify to this. Pupils talk knowledgeably about the importance of a healthy diet and exercise, understanding the contribution these make to their health and well-being. Pupils in each key stage behave well and display caring attitudes towards others. They are enormously proud of the work that they do in and beyond their local community. Some 'Mini-Vinnies', for example, told me that they take pleasure in 'helping the world to be a better place', 'writing prayers for people who may be hurt or lonely' and 'looking after the elderly'. One parent's view encapsulated the views of many who responded to Ofsted's survey or spoke with me: 'This is a fabulous school that is entirely focused on the spiritual, educational and emotional well-being of its pupils.'
- On taking up post, you quickly identified aspects of teaching and learning in early years that showed room for improvement. Together with the local authority's support, you and the early years leader raised adults' expectations of what children can do and achieve. Children now tackle more stimulating and challenging tasks, especially in phonics, reading and mathematics. You enhanced the early years environment, making sure that children benefited from accessing good-quality resources and provision, indoors and outside. As a result, children's outcomes have improved and rates of progress are good. From broadly typical starting points, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development in 2016 and 2017 exceeded national averages. You recognise that there is still more to do to ensure that children's writing skills, particularly those of boys, develop apace to fully prepare children for the challenges of the key stage 1 curriculum.
- In key stages 1 and 2, you correctly challenged and supported staff to improve pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Together with senior leaders, you pinpointed and tackled the correct priorities. For example, leaders' monitoring procedures have been tightened and performance targets now focus on pupils' outcomes as well as individual staff needs. Regular, good-quality professional development and training opportunities take place. As a result of effective leadership and your decisive actions, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in each subject has risen to exceed national averages. Pupils of all abilities read with improved fluency and confidence. From typical starting points, this represents good progress. The work in pupils' books currently shows that most pupils continue to make good or better progress.
- Senior leaders have recognised that the proportion of pupils in key stages 1 and 2 reaching greater depths of learning, particularly in reading and writing, has remained lower than in other schools nationally over time. Leaders and staff have recently taken several appropriate steps to address underlying issues. The profile of reading has been raised, incentives have been offered to inspire and engage readers, and a wealth of increasingly challenging texts has been made available

to pupils. Such actions contributed to a larger proportion of pupils, including the most able, reaching greater depths of learning in reading in 2017. Your current priority, writing at greater depth, particularly for boys, is the correct one.

- You are intent on raising pupils' achievements across the curriculum. You noticed, however, that the majority of subject leaders required additional support and more opportunities to enable them to manage their areas of responsibility confidently and successfully. Through training, sharing good practices within and across schools and by empowering individuals, most subject leaders now have improved skills, knowledge and understanding of their roles. Some subject leaders' planning, however, including that for English and science, lacks the information and detail required to fully support and drive improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils, particularly boys, are supported and challenged to write with greater depths of knowledge, understanding and skills, in each key stage
- subject leaders' plans, especially in English and science, are sufficiently detailed to bring about measurable improvements
- up-to-date safeguarding and child protection guidance is communicated in detail to all adults working with pupils and is fully reflected in policy as well as practice.

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

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spent time with you and other leaders. We jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in classes across key stages. I scrutinised work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils formally and informally. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your school improvement plans. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with a representative from the local authority. I talked with parents at the school gate, taking account of 46 free-text comments and 76 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The views of the 22 members of staff and the 22 pupils who completed their respective Ofsted online questionnaires were taken into consideration.