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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Jill Burgess
Headteacher
St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Dipton
North Road
Dipton
Flint Hill
Stanley
County Durham
DH9 9BB

Dear Mrs Burgess

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

Following my visit to the school on 11 January 2018, 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. You have established a focus upon continuing improvement that is shared by all staff and members of the governing body. You have strengthened leadership by giving middle leaders responsibility for both implementing and evaluating the impact of improvement strategies. You and your teaching team have reviewed the teaching and the assessment of the new national curriculum and brought in changes that are providing additional challenge for pupils. As a result of effective teaching, strong systems and clear leadership direction, pupils make good progress and achieve good and improving standards.

You and your team have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The school improvement plan is now carefully measured and monitored to evaluate its ongoing impact. Your staff have a clear awareness of areas for improvement, many of which are incorporated into their performance objectives. You and your team carefully consider the potential value of improvement strategies before committing time and funding to their implementation. You have given subject and phase leaders increasing responsibility for sharing good practice and there are signs that these approaches are improving pupils' progress.

You and your team have a sharp understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Your English subject leader has brought in new strategies to

improve pupils' writing. Pupils are using discussion and dramatic gesture to strengthen their understanding of story structure. These approaches are being implemented with purpose and enthusiasm across the school. However, this initiative remains at an early stage and boys continue to make slower progress in writing than girls. Your mathematics leader is developing new initiatives to heighten pupils' problem-solving and reasoning. In books and classes, there is evidence that these approaches are improving progress and enabling increasing proportions of pupils to work at a greater depth of understanding.

In 2017, your team responded more purposefully to the demands of the new national curriculum, with improving outcomes across all key stages. Pupils made good progress in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2, although their progress in writing was not as strong. The proportions of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics were above those seen nationally at keys stages 1 and 2. The proportions of pupils reaching a greater depth of understanding were below that seen nationally in reading and writing, particularly for boys, and above that seen nationally in mathematics and English grammar, punctuation and spelling tests.

You and your team maintain a focus on high standards through regular monitoring. You review pupils' progress on a termly basis and additional work sampling provides ongoing focus on the quality of provision. You and your team have sought additional scrutiny to check standards from external partners and the local authority. Advisers from the local authority worked with leaders to improve provision and assessment in the early years. Leaders' actions contributed to a 10% improvement in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2017, although more needs to be done to improve the proportions of pupils exceeding those standards. You and your middle leaders work with cluster schools to regularly moderate pupils' work, leading to accurate standards of assessment. By balancing professional development with close monitoring, you are establishing strong processes that are supporting continuing progress.

You and your team engender a culture of mutual respect and tolerance where the uniqueness of every child is valued. Pupils appreciate opportunities to take on responsibilities and Year 6 pupils provide support for children in the early years. Pupils value their education and this is reflected in the exceptionally high rates of attendance that you have sustained.

Governors have a very strong understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They apply their expertise well. Governors with professional experience in areas such as finance, safeguarding and special educational needs (SEN) use their knowledge to provide appropriate support and challenge. The chair of governors and her team have devised appropriate committee structures to hold leaders to account. They receive regular information on pupils' progress and question leaders, including subject leaders, on aspects of progress. Governors carry out regular visits to the school to gain direct insight into pupils' perceptions and progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and staff are mindful of pupils' welfare. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults working at the school. The headteacher ensures that staff receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues. Any concerns over pupils' welfare are pursued thoroughly and recorded accurately. A governor, with appropriate expertise in safeguarding, oversees safeguarding practices at the school. Pupils feel safe and the vast majority of their parents and carers agree. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online. The school has developed particular expertise in online safety that is shared with other schools.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection with much success. The school improvement plan is now carefully reviewed and monitored to evaluate its ongoing impact and teachers are sharing good practice and initiatives to heighten progress.
- Pupils consistently demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Teachers have developed strong learning habits and routines that support good progress. Pupils demonstrate high levels of courtesy and care towards one another and adults. Rates of attendance are very high as pupils value their learning and find the school a welcoming place in which to learn.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics learning. They have regular opportunities to practise a range of number operations and calculations. New initiatives provide pupils with regular opportunities to develop their reasoning and explain their choices and methods. These approaches are supporting pupils in making good and improving progress, with increasing proportions reaching greater depths of understanding.
- Teachers use effective strategies to develop pupils' reading skills in the early years and at key stages 1 and 2. Outcomes in the phonics screening check are typically in line with those seen nationally, with the vast majority of pupils achieving the required standard. Pupils typically make good progress in reading, although not as many achieve higher standards or reach greater depth across the school.
- New initiatives are helping pupils to develop and remember their understanding of narrative structure by representing texts through visual symbols and dramatic actions. There is evidence that this is motivating pupils while additional opportunities to work outdoors are providing boys with further inspiration to write. Some signs of progress are emerging, although initiatives are at an early stage and variance remains between the quality of boys' and girls' writing.
- The early years leader has worked with advisers from the local authority to strengthen provision. Links with families are being extended through 'come and play' sessions that are held on a half-termly basis. Provision has been enhanced with a range of prompts to support children's learning in dedicated areas. These

approaches contributed to a 10% improvement in the proportions of children achieving a good level of development in 2017, although too few children make deeper progress.

- Leaders and governors track the progress of disadvantaged pupils carefully. The deputy headteacher provides dedicated support to assist their progress. These actions have contributed to high rates of attendance for these pupils and good levels of participation in after-school clubs and activities. Disadvantaged pupils made improving progress in reading and mathematics in 2017 and their current progress shows that differences are continuing to diminish.
- Leaders carefully consider the support required to improve provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. They work with external partners to diagnose pupils' needs and develop programmes of support. The majority of parents attend review meetings to check the impact of support. These approaches help pupils to make good progress from their starting points.
- Teachers provide pupils with regular opportunities to pursue scientific explorations and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing is further accelerated through the consistent implementation of new initiatives
- teachers provide further challenge in lessons in order to increase the proportion of pupils, particularly boys, reaching a greater depth of understanding
- improvements in the early years are further accelerated to enable children to make more rapid progress
- middle leaders implement and closely evaluate the effectiveness of new initiatives to improve progress in English and mathematics.

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

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored initiatives to improve pupils' progress in writing. I also looked at the actions of leaders and teachers to improve the proportion of

pupils working at greater depth, particularly boys. I explored actions to improve outcomes in the early years foundation stage. I also looked at the attendance of particular groups of pupils and the actions to support progress for disadvantaged pupils.

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also spoke to four members of the governing body, including the chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I also talked to the school improvement partner from the local authority. I looked at learning in lessons with you. I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, local authority monitoring reports, behaviour and attendance information and pupil tracking. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 41 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, 19 free-text responses, 22 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.