

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 February 2017

Mrs Samantha Leslie
Headteacher
St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School
Norham Road
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 0LF

Dear Mrs Leslie

Short inspection of St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 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 July 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 offer calm, yet determined leadership to the school and are ably supported by your deputy headteacher, who shares your drive for continuous improvement.

In response to the school's last inspection, you introduced a detailed and comprehensive assessment system for tracking pupils' achievements. You use this well to identify those pupils who have fallen behind in their learning and ensure that they receive the right support to catch up. As a result, pupils across the school are making good progress.

You acknowledge that standards dipped in 2015, particularly in writing. You wasted no time in making explicit your expectations of staff to raise standards in basic punctuation and presentation as well as to develop pupils' oracy skills. The impact of this is borne out by the improvement in pupils' achievement in 2016. This was above the national average in all subjects, at both the expected standard and the high standard for children of this age.

You have eradicated weaker teaching through effective performance management. Your staff team value the support and training you provide for them.

The foundations of your successful leadership are securing warm and trusting relationships. You have nurtured an ethos where everyone is respected. As a result, pupils are highly focused in lessons and know that adults are there to support them.

Over the last two years there have been several staff changes to positions of responsibility in middle leadership. You are providing support and training to enable these middle leaders to undertake their roles effectively. They have a thorough subject knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects. They play a full role in checking progress in their subjects and have many ideas to secure further improvements.

Governors share the same determination as you to raise achievement. They use their skills well to focus the work of the sub-committees and they hold you to account for improving pupils' achievement.

A commissioned review of the provision in the early years has resulted in improved practice and increasing proportions of pupils reaching a good level of development. In 2016 these were above the national average and inspection evidence indicates this will be sustained in 2017. Although much has been achieved, there remains a disparity between the quality of learning indoors compared with that of outdoors.

Attendance overall is above average, but you rightly identified the high persistent absence rates for disadvantaged pupils and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result of focused support there has recently been a marked improvement in the attendance rates of these pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders take their responsibilities seriously for keeping children safe. They ensure that policy and procedure reflect the latest guidance and that record-keeping is compliant with statutory recommendations. You and several members of the governing body have undertaken safer recruitment training to ensure there are rigorous appointment procedures.

Staff understand their collective responsibilities for keeping children safe. A detailed local authority review of health and safety arrangements has been undertaken. Governors addressed the identified areas for improvement with promptness.

The curriculum is used well to develop pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. It is supported by a detailed programme of assemblies. For example, pupils spoke confidently about how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- Your evaluation of pupils' achievement is accurate. You know what makes effective teaching and have ensured that your high expectations are shared by all staff.

- You invest in high-quality training to ensure that teachers' skills are relevant and reflect the demands of the curriculum. You use the shared expertise of the local teaching school alliance to support this process. Teaching across the school is good.
- Systems for tracking attainment and progress are supporting your identification of pupils whose learning has stalled. You use this information to target additional support and intervention well. This has led to accelerated rates of progress, particularly for those pupils who need to catch up and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- There is only a small proportion of disadvantaged pupils within the school. That said, leaders are aware of their needs and target intervention to support their progress. As a result, differences are diminishing and in some year groups these pupils perform better than their peers.
- There is a strong picture of achievement in all years and in all subjects. Attainment and progress of pupils at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 were above the national average in all subjects.
- Relationships are a strength of the school. Pupils display exemplary behaviour for learning. They talk confidently about their work and feel very well supported in their learning by all adults. Pupils take great pride in their work. Work in all subjects is extremely well presented.
- Pupils' phonic knowledge is secure and this is borne out by the improving outcomes in the Year 1 check of phonics knowledge. The most able pupils read fluently and with expression and are able to discuss confidently their preferences.
- Pupils' writing skills have been strengthened, in part by pupils' improving knowledge of correct grammar and punctuation. However, across the school writing remains an area for further improvement.
- Attainment and progress in mathematics are strengthening across the school. Weaker skills in reasoning and problem solving have been tackled and work in pupils' books shows the improved progress pupils are making in these aspects of mathematics.
- Outcomes in the early years have strengthened and there is a rising trend in the proportions of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception. Technology is used well to engage pupils in their learning and reinforce basic skills in reading and mathematics. There is some inconsistency in the quality of outdoor learning, which you have recognised as an area for improvement.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and have embraced the training and support given to them. The plans they produce would be strengthened further by using assessment information more sharply to identify precise improvements in pupils' achievement. That said, they are clear about the strengths and weaknesses in their subject and identify the correct priorities for improvement. For example, the subject leader for mathematics rightly identified that pupils need more opportunities to reason about their learning. This is now evident within the books reviewed.
- Overall pupils' outcomes have strengthened as result of sharper analysis of assessment information and an improvement to the quality of teaching.
- The governing body are effective and use their collective skills well to challenge and support leaders. This is contributing to the school's continuous improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards in writing are improved even further, so that a greater number of pupils in each year meet the higher standard
- improvements are made to provision for outdoor learning in the early years, so that it is as comprehensive and robust as provision indoors.

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 Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored the effectiveness of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I looked at the progress of key groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able pupils.

During the inspection, I held discussions with you and the middle leaders about your plans for improvement and your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I also spoke to several members of the governing body and the school improvement adviser from the local authority. I undertook tours of the school with you, looking at pupils' work in lessons, talking to pupils about their learning and listening to them read. I conducted a further scrutiny of pupils' work in religious education, English, mathematics and topics. I examined your safeguarding documents, including the record of security checks carried out on each member of staff, assessment information, behaviour and attendance information and pupils' assessment records. I took account of three responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire, five responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 45 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View.