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16 March 2016

Mrs Nora Hughes
Headteacher
St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Fairfield Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS19 7PL

Dear Mrs Hughes

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

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 2016, 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 March 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You, and your leadership team, have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There is a very positive atmosphere within the school in which pupils thrive. Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong. Pupils are proud of their school and show respect and care towards others. They have positive attitudes towards learning and know that their views and opinions are valued by adults.

Since the last inspection, the curriculum has been reviewed and improved. After consultation with pupils, leaders agreed to begin topics with a 'big question' and then allow pupils to carry out research for homework before the first lesson on the topic. This enthuses pupils to want to learn more. The teachers move pupils on effectively in their learning, taking account of their interests. There are now more opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills across other subjects in the curriculum. For example, pupils indicated that they use computers to produce PowerPoint presentations about their work in history, and to conduct research to help them learn more about each topic. Teachers usually mark work conscientiously and make suggestions or pose questions for pupils to respond to, in line with the school's marking policy. However, pupils do not always show that they have improved their work as a result of teachers' marking. There are more opportunities for pupils to write at length, particularly in religious education. Pupils now have targets to help them improve their writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The systems to make sure that appropriate checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children are implemented rigorously. Staff are alert to any risks to pupils' well-being. Adults have received the required levels of training. The safeguarding policy had not been updated in respect of the most recent government legislation prior to the inspection. The policy was updated during the inspection and now makes reference to the most recent published government documents.

A high priority is given to keeping pupils safe. Pupils talk knowledgeably about how they are taught to keep themselves safe: for example, through learning about road safety, proficiency in cycling and when using computers. Members of the school council carry out their own health and safety checks throughout the school, accompanied by a member of the governing body. They are keen to ensure that all pupils in the school are kept safe. Pupils relish their roles as 'Pat's pals'. These pupils act as mentors to other pupils on the school yard and pupils know they can approach them if they have a concern. Pupils I spoke to were adamant that there is no bullying and were able to explain what bullying is and what they should do if it occurs. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated that their children feel safe at school. Attendance is broadly average. Absences are followed up to check that pupils are safe when they are not in school.

Inspection findings

- Subject and other leaders work effectively as a team supporting one another to make improvements in the school. They carefully check how well pupils are learning by looking at pupils' books and teachers' planning, and through visiting classrooms. They provide useful advice to help staff improve their practice.
- The school improvement plan has a large number of priorities as all subject and other leaders contribute action plans. Targets are not focused as sharply as they could be on improving outcomes for all groups of pupils and it is not clear how progress on these actions can be measured or monitored.
- Governors use their expertise well to challenge school leaders to improve and ensure the strategic direction of the school. This is evident in the minutes of governing body meetings. Pupils are very aware of who the governors are and how they support the school. This is because governors value pupils' views and encourage them to have a strong voice within the school. The headteacher, and governors, are ambitious for staff and leaders to reach their potential and ensure that they have opportunities to attend training to develop their skills.
- You, and other leaders, are committed to ensuring that pupils achieve as well as they can. Teachers know the pupils well and are able to identify any who are underachieving. Staff take action promptly to address any concerns.

- Teachers use their skills effectively to motivate pupils in their learning. For example, in upper Key Stage 2, pupils are given challenging work and are asked thought-provoking questions which enable them to think more deeply. For example, in mathematics, pupils are encouraged to consider concepts in more depth. Teachers have good subject knowledge, use subject-specific vocabulary effectively and ensure that pupils know and understand it.
- Pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning. For example, they enjoy the science days when they have opportunities to carry out experiments and share their findings with others. Pupils I spoke to talked knowledgeably about their work on static electricity and how the human body works.
- Children in the early years make a good start to their education. They are able to work independently and concentrate well on tasks. Children in Reception were very enthusiastic when learning about dinosaurs, particularly when making dinosaur footprints and creating a name for a new dinosaur, including their own name. They shared the books they had brought in from home and were able to name different dinosaurs with confidence.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of British values. They show great empathy towards those less fortunate than themselves and carry out work in the local and wider community to support others. For example, pupils are supporting children in an orphanage in Estonia. They learn about other religions such as Judaism and Islam, and show tolerance and respect towards others.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points, which are broadly typical for pupils of their age. They usually reach standards which are above the national average by the time they reach the end of Year 6. However, there was a dip in results in 2015. Leaders are aware of the reasons for this and have taken steps to address any issues. The school's own data, pupils' work and evidence from monitoring support the leaders' view that results are on track to improve this year. The teaching of phonics (sounds and the letters they represent) is effective and pupils in Year 1 achieve highly in the phonics screening check.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school improvement plan focuses on improving outcomes for all groups of pupils, and has precise targets and milestones by which success can be measured and checked
- pupils improve their work in response to teachers' feedback and comments.

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 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short, one-day inspection, I met with you and a group of subject and other leaders. I held meetings with a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Together we visited some classrooms to observe the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, talked to pupils and looked at their work. We discussed your school improvement plan and your current school self-evaluation. I evaluated a range of documents including minutes of governing body meetings, pupils' performance information, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, information on pupils' attendance and documents relating to safeguarding. I considered the 45 responses to Parent View and four staff questionnaires. Pupil questionnaires were not completed as part of this inspection.