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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Joseph Wheatley
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School
Duckpool Lane
Whickham
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE16 4HB

Dear Mr Wheatley

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 June 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 and your staff team have developed a happy, caring community, where pupils are supported to thrive academically, personally and spiritually. Pupils are eager to learn and put their best efforts into their work in the classroom and into the wide range of activities which enrich the curriculum. Opportunities for pupils, such as cycling the coast-to-coast route, growing and selling their own vegetables and learning a musical instrument, are appreciated. The vast majority of parents and carers are full of praise for the dedication and commitment of you and your team.

You are improving the school because you have focused on the right priorities. You have made good use of your own considerable expertise and knowledge of effective teaching to develop the skills of your staff. Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2015, you have worked relentlessly to address the improvement priorities set at the previous school inspection. You have ensured that teachers are clear about the demands of the new national curriculum and that they have the skills they need to assess pupils' achievement accurately. More teaching is now securing strong progress from pupils and you have correctly identified where there is further room for improvement to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can.

A higher proportion of children than found nationally meet and exceed the expected standard for their age by the time they leave the Reception Year. Across the school, most disadvantaged pupils achieve well, with some making very rapid progress from their

starting points to reach the highest levels of attainment. You know, however, that you have more to do to ensure that a few children who join the school with lower starting points, including some disadvantaged pupils, make faster progress to catch up quickly to the standards expected for their age.

In response to a dip in outcomes achieved by pupils in 2016 in mathematics, you have taken highly effective action to improve the quality of teaching. This has led to a significant increase in the proportion of pupils meeting and exceeding the expected standards across the school in mathematics this year. You have further improved the teaching of reading and English grammar, punctuation and spelling, across key stage 2 and this has accelerated pupils' progress in these subjects with more pupils reaching the expected standard. The school's previously high performance in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been sustained with every pupil meeting the expected standard this academic year. You are aware that, although you have made some improvements to the teaching of writing across the school, there is more to do to ensure that a higher proportion of pupils meet the highest standards. You have plans in place to address this issue. Your exceptionally effective action to improve outcomes for pupils in mathematics demonstrates that you and your team have the capacity to improve the school further.

You and the governing body have used your knowledge of the school to set the correct priorities for improvement and to improve aspects of the school's performance successfully. However, you recognise that the evaluation of the impact of your work, for example, to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, is not always as sharp as it could be.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are meticulous in ensuring that detailed records are maintained of all incidents relating to the safety of pupils. You report frequently to the governing body about aspects of pupils' behaviour and safety. The designated safeguarding governor regularly reviews aspects of your work to assure herself that the school's arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Staff have received appropriate training so that they are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities.

Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their work to promote safety to others. For example, Year 6 have created videos to share messages about online safety. Pupils were clear about the potential risks to their safety when they are using the internet and could articulate the steps necessary to minimise the risks. All of the 119 pupils who responded to the inspection questionnaire indicated that they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- You and the leader for mathematics carefully analysed the achievement of pupils in mathematics in 2016 to identify precisely why attainment was declining. You provided training for teachers so that teaching is now supporting pupils to develop better mathematical fluency when completing calculations. Professional development for staff has increased the amount and the quality of problem-solving opportunities for pupils in their mathematics work. Pupils' workbooks show that they work systematically to

grapple with complex challenges and are regularly required to explain and prove their mathematical reasoning. Consequently, pupils' progress has accelerated rapidly this year in mathematics, particularly in upper key stage 2. A much higher proportion of pupils are working at and exceeding the expected levels for their age in mathematics, compared to the previous academic year.

- The additional support interventions in place for mathematics were not previously effective enough to address gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge. You and your leader for mathematics devised your own assessment process and sequence of activities to meet the specific needs of your pupils. A higher level teaching assistant received training to deliver the programme. Parents attended an information session and received a resource pack, to be used at home, tailored precisely to the individual needs of each pupil. This provided families with the means to better support their children. Your pupil progress review meetings have demonstrated that this work has increased pupils' confidence with mathematics and enabled them to make better progress. This approach is symptomatic of your determination to develop a highly personalised curriculum which secures the best progress for your pupils.
- Since your appointment, you have supported teachers to improve their understanding of the new national curriculum and framework for assessment. This is enabling teachers to move away from previously used schemes of work and plan lessons which are designed to address the particular needs of pupils. Consequently, more teaching is securing stronger progress from pupils. For example, teachers' better understanding of the assessment of English grammar, punctuation and spelling is leading to more focused teaching. A higher proportion of pupils are, now, meeting and exceeding the expected standard for their age. However, you have identified correctly that while this aspect of pupils' English work is improving, not enough pupils are reaching the highest standards of attainment in writing. You know that pupils need greater opportunities to write at length and to practise and develop their ability to write for different audiences and purposes.
- Since the previous inspection, you have strengthened the quality of adult-led teaching in the Reception Year so that teachers work intensively with small groups of children. This was evident during the inspection, where a teacher led a discussion with a group of children to reflect on a train journey, using train tickets to stimulate their ideas. Children wrote about the experience and made good progress because they were challenged well by the teacher to use their knowledge of phonics in their writing. However, those pupils who have starting points which are below those typically seen for their age do not always make the rapid progress needed to catch up to the expected standard by the end of the Reception Year. You also recognise that there is more to do to ensure that other learning opportunities, including those where children work independently, are suitably challenging for all children.
- You meticulously track the progress of your disadvantaged pupils, and governors receive regular updates on the performance of this cohort of pupils. The spending of pupil premium funding is targeted appropriately at the needs of disadvantaged pupils and teaching is supporting most to achieve well. In particular, a growing number of disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress to reach the higher standards of attainment. You understand that there are still a few disadvantaged pupils with lower starting points who need to make even faster progress to catch up to the expected standard for their age. You also recognise that you need to evaluate the impact of your

pupil premium spending with greater precision so that you are absolutely clear about which actions are having the best impact on improving outcomes for pupils. This will enable you to set more measurable targets in your school development plan and ensure that governors can keep a better check on the impact of your actions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils with low prior attainment, including those in early years and those who are disadvantaged, make the rapid progress needed to catch up quickly and reach the expected standard for their age
- provision in the early years for children to work independently and to choose their own learning is sufficiently challenging, so that they make the best progress possible
- the teaching of writing supports a higher proportion of pupils to work at greater depth
- actions to improve the school's performance are carefully evaluated and that this information is used to set precise and measurable targets which can be closely checked.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. I observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I met with a representative of the local authority. I spoke informally to pupils during lunchtime and in lessons. I reviewed the work in a sample of pupils' books with leaders. I evaluated information in relation to pupils' progress, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. I reviewed the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 87 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), 119 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 14 responses to the staff questionnaire.