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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Clare Swales
Headteacher
St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Ropery Lane
Chester le Street
County Durham
DH3 3PH

Dear Mrs Swales

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

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, your leadership team and governors share a vision for excellence, underpinned by your desire to create a truly inclusive school. Your highly motivated staff feel well supported because you have involved them fully in key developments and given them the right training to enable them to achieve well. This has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Parents value the care you take of pupils in your care, which means their children enjoy coming to school.

Good-quality provision in the Reception class ensures that children get off to a flying start. Effective teaching ensures that pupils make good and often rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics as they move through the school. Your system to track pupils' achievement is used very effectively by all teachers to check how well pupils are doing on a day-to-day basis. It also helps teachers plan work at the right level of challenge. Teachers respond swiftly, with well-targeted support, if pupils need extra help to catch up. As a result, pupils currently in the school make good progress. Gaps are closing in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils compared with others, because you ensure that teachers make them a high priority.

Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and behave very well. They listen carefully to their peers and teachers, showing a great deal of respect for others. This helps them focus well in lessons. The school's work means pupils think carefully about their responsibilities and how to treat others kindly. Pupils respond to these expectations willingly. They make the most of the many opportunities to apply for important roles, such as school councillors, Mini Vinnies (pupils who support the community) and buddies for the children joining the school. This helps them develop leadership skills, and understand concepts such as democracy and supporting others. Pupils are very well prepared for secondary school and beyond.

At the time of your last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including excellent care, guidance and support. They also identified a need to provide more activities which would relentlessly challenge and probe pupils' thinking and understanding enough to ensure that all pupils learn rapidly, so as to exceed what is expected of them. Leaders have addressed this successfully, as evidenced through the end of key stage 2 assessments where the proportion of pupils achieving higher than expected standards was greater than the national average.

The previous inspection report also stated that occasionally opportunities were missed to encourage pupils to work things out for themselves and to practise their writing skills. You have been largely successful in addressing this issue too.

You have correctly recognised the need to improve standards in specific subject areas. In particular, you aim to increase the progress which pupils make in science, history and geography. Your senior leaders are skilled in monitoring and evaluating the provision in the subjects they lead, and they are improving the standards pupils achieve in English and mathematics. However, some leaders are new to their roles and have not had the opportunity to ensure the same level of support and guidance to lead improvements in history, geography and science. As a result, standards and provision are weaker in these subjects.

Notwithstanding your successes in maintaining the overall high standards, you are aiming higher and are determined to ensure that all groups of pupils achieve as well as they can. You analyse information about pupil progress forensically, to identify the right key priorities to help you improve still further. Your well-thought-out school development plan sets clear expectations for specific groups of pupils, especially the disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

You have been successful in ensuring that the minority of disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school regularly do so more frequently and achieve more successfully. It is essential that governors also analyse the achievement of the disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to ensure that they more accurately identify the success or otherwise of these vulnerable groups. They tend to rely heavily on the information you supply. While this is largely accurate, there is currently a lack of

rigour and no external view of standards.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe are appropriately managed. Staff are regularly trained in safeguarding procedures, including keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, which they clearly understand.

Everyone at St Cuthbert's makes safety a priority. Pupils justifiably say they feel safe at school and parents rightly agree. Information on anti-bullying and computer safety teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including from cyber bullying. Pupils say that bullying is rare, but that if it does occur, they know that staff deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils usually play very happily together at playtimes. They are confident if they cannot sort out any disagreement, an adult is always around to help.

Pupils' safety is high profile and it is regularly discussed at staff meetings and governor meetings. Adults know what action to take if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare, and you promptly involve the right agencies when appropriate. Leaders and governors have sensibly carried out a safeguarding audit to check all arrangements are properly in place.

Inspection findings

- You are ambitious for each and every pupil in your school because you firmly believe 'they deserve the best'. You have developed a collaborative and supportive ethos across the school. All staff work closely together to achieve your clearly stated aims to improve the school and make it outstanding.
- Most pupils attend very regularly because they really enjoy coming to school. The vast majority of pupils have extremely positive attitudes to their work. They listen carefully and try their best.
- You accurately identify what the school needs to work on next. All leaders are focused on the same priorities, ensuring that there is a cohesive approach to improvements. Leaders make thorough checks on the school's work in reading, writing and mathematics and ensure that teachers act on their advice. As a result, standards are high and pupils make strong progress. However, leaders of other subjects are not as effective and the work in science, history and geography is not monitored robustly enough. As a result, pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in these subjects are not developed consistently and opportunities are missed for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Governors visit school and make regular checks to see how well the school is doing. They ask pertinent questions to focus leaders' thinking and drive improvements. However, they rely very heavily on the information provided by school leaders and do not robustly focus enough on the progress being made by vulnerable groups, including the disadvantaged pupils and those

who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Class teachers make good use of the new assessment system to check pupils' progress, acting quickly if any pupil starts to fall behind. Leaders also use it regularly to hold teachers to account for pupils' achievement. This makes it a useful tool for improvement. Teachers make sure that pupils know exactly how to tackle their work because they provide clear instructions. They quickly pick up on any misconceptions, developing pupils' confidence and understanding to help them succeed. Teachers work hard to accelerate pupils' progress by providing stimulating starting points, especially through the use of literature.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 are consistently well above the national average. The vast majority of pupils make at least the progress they should across these subjects, and many do better. However, most pupils, and particularly the most able, do not make the same rapid progress in history and geography.
- The progress of the relatively small proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a key focus for your work. Although published data shows these pupils do not achieve as well as others, the school's information about current standards indicates that the differences are diminishing. This is backed up by evidence in pupils' books, which shows them making good progress over time. The interventions you put in place to support pupils who are not at age-related expectations is effectively helping pupils catch up with where they should be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The high-quality monitoring seen in English and mathematics is replicated in other subjects, especially science, history and geography. This is needed to ensure that pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in these subjects improve and more closely match the high standards seen in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Governors are provided with more detailed information about the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and that they receive information from other sources in addition to that received from school leaders.

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

Stephen Bywater
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the senior leadership team. I also met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and took account of additional communications from governors unable to make the meeting. I had a conversation with a representative of the local authority and I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, information about pupils' progress, and safeguarding documents. I listened to pupils read and talked with a group of pupils about their views of school. I made short visits to lessons accompanied by you. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school and looked at pupils' books. I considered 32 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including their written comments.