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Mrs Pemberton
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Oswaldtwistle
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Dear Mrs Pemberton

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Oswaldtwistle

Following my visit to the school on 28 September 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders and governors know the school well. They base their evaluation and areas for improvement on the wealth of knowledge gathered. Leaders and governors have the pupils at the heart of what they do.

You and your recently appointed deputy headteacher work well as a team. You have worked together to develop the skills of other staff. Subject leaders lead their areas of responsibility very well. They ensure that pupils receive a wide variety of opportunities across the curriculum and pupils develop skills in different subjects. Subject leaders have a good understanding of the strengths in their subjects. Through careful analysis of what pupils know and can do, they carefully plan further developments.

Governors are ambitious for the school and have a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for further improvement. They use their skills to challenge leaders to ensure the best outcomes for pupils.

You and your team have taken effective action to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Teachers and other adults now regularly check on what pupils know and can do. They use this information to adjust their teaching during the lesson. They do this particularly well to support lower-ability pupils.

You deploy teaching assistants effectively. Additional adults work well with different groups of pupils. You have ensured that additional adults have the necessary skills to work with groups of pupils to help them to catch up with their peers in English and mathematics. Teaching assistants have benefited from training in questioning pupils to move learning on. This is having a significant impact on pupils' progress.

Pupils' outcomes in mathematics have improved. However, teachers do not move some of the most able pupils on quickly enough. There are times when pupils undertake too much consolidation before moving on to deepen their understanding. This hampers progress towards the higher standards. You acknowledge that teachers give pupils too few opportunities to investigate numbers and number patterns. This limits the opportunities for pupils to work at greater depth or to attain higher standards.

You are not complacent and recognise that while pupils make good progress, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standards in writing and mathematics can be increased across the school. You acknowledge that, in particular, boys' writing at key stage 1 could be improved further.

You have taken effective steps to ensure that there has been no disruption to learning following the promotion of your deputy headteacher. Staff support each other well in this caring, happy environment, where everyone is valued. Parents, too, speak warmly of the family feel, where staff know all children and cater for their individual needs.

Pupils behave well in this caring school. Pupils care for and help one another. Older pupils take the responsibility of being a 'gardener' in your 'seeds and gardeners' programme very seriously. Through this, they look after, encourage and support the younger pupils very well. They live out your mission statement, with one pupil saying, 'We need to care for and love one another because we are all one family.' Pupils trust adults to help them when they are struggling with their work. Pupils are safe and say that they feel safe because of the carefully planned curriculum. Adults promote British values well and link these to the school's mission statement. Pupils learn about different faiths and wider-world cultures and are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors ensure that all policies and procedures are in place, including checks on teachers and governors. Training for staff is comprehensive and up to date. You demonstrate a determination to ensure that pupils are kept safe and your dedicated team support you well. Consequently, all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality.

Inspection findings

- Pupils benefit from good teaching in all key stages. You constantly check the quality of teaching and respond to your findings with appropriate support and training.

- A key line of enquiry for this inspection was about the outcomes for children at the end of the Reception Year.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year had declined slightly over several years. However, this proportion was consistently above national averages. In 2016, this proportion was in line with national averages. Provisional data for 2017 shows that the proportion of children attaining a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year is above national averages. As children start school with skills and abilities slightly below those typical for their age, this shows good progress from the start of the year.
- Early years staff have a good understanding of the children in the Reception Year. They ensure that the children in the mixed-age class receive the same opportunities for development as those in the single-age class. Adults use their knowledge of what the children know and can do to plan effectively for children's next steps in their learning.
- Early years staff have developed a stimulating environment, both indoors and out. They have ensured that this meets the needs of children in all areas of provision.
- Leaders have identified a need to increase the rate of progress in the early years in communication and in writing. Adults provide a wealth of opportunities for children to write, both inside and out. They use effective questioning to develop language and communication skills. However, at times, adults are so eager to help children learn that they do not give the children sufficient opportunities to respond.
- Teachers and other adults work closely with parents and value the information they receive about what children have achieved at home.
- A second line of enquiry was about the effectiveness of leaders' actions to increase the rate of progress in writing, particularly boys' writing, in key stage 1. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards at the end of 2017 has improved from 2016. This is now in line with national averages. A greater proportion of pupils, including boys, has reached greater depth and are working at higher standards.
- The boys who did not reach the expected standard in writing in 2016 have benefited from additional support in Year 3. As a result, the majority of these pupils have caught up with their peers.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge means that they develop pupils' writing in a systematic way. As a result, pupils are clear about what teachers expect. Teachers ensure that they develop pupils' understanding of grammar, punctuation and spelling throughout. Teachers give pupils in key stage 1 many opportunities to write in different curriculum areas. This is of a particularly good quality in history and religious education, and is of the same quality as that seen in English.

- Although teachers develop pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, they do not develop pupils' vocabulary to same standard. Pupils in key stage 1 use only basic vocabulary when writing, which limits their progress.
- Pupils in key stage 1 do not use their growing knowledge of phonics consistently when writing independently, resulting in fewer pupils reaching the standards of which they are capable.
- I also looked at the outcomes for middle-attaining pupils in mathematics in key stage 1 and key stage 2. Provisional outcomes in 2017 have improved from 2016 in both key stages. At key stage 1, the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards is now in line with national averages. The proportion reaching greater depth is slightly higher than national averages.
- At key stage 2, progress and attainment in mathematics is in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils working at the higher standards has improved from 2016 and is now in line with national averages. Current lower- and middle-attaining pupils in both key stages are making good progress towards reaching the expected standards.
- Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge in mathematics. They check regularly on pupils' understanding and adjust their teaching where necessary. Teachers use some imaginative approaches to teaching basic mathematical skills. For example in Year 6, the teacher challenged the pupils to solve calculations to find clues about a missing lunchbox. The answers to the clues eventually led to the culprit. Pupils were given a choice of calculations, some harder than others. Pupils were excited by the learning and chose the harder tasks for themselves. Consequently, the pupils persevered with the tasks and corrected their own mistakes when the answer did not make sense.
- Teachers challenge the most able pupils and pupils encourage them to push themselves. Consequently, the most able pupils are making good progress towards the higher standards in mathematics.
- Teachers give pupils opportunities to reinforce and practise what they know in mathematics. However, teachers do not move pupils on quickly enough when they have understood. At times, pupils complete pages of correct calculations before teachers challenge their thinking. Teachers give pupils insufficient opportunities to explain their mathematical thinking. They do not work with pupils to develop skills relating to investigating number patterns and sequences. This is hampering the progress of middle-ability and some of the most able pupils from reaching the higher standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of pupils in key stage 1 and 2 reach the higher standards in mathematics by:
 - ensuring that teachers give pupils more opportunities to deepen their understanding

- giving pupils opportunities to talk about what they are doing and what they are finding out about numbers
- giving pupils opportunities to investigate number patterns and sequences.
- a greater proportion of key stage 1 pupils, particularly boys, reach the expected and higher standards in writing by:
 - developing pupils' vocabulary
 - ensuring that pupils use their growing knowledge of phonics when writing independently.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team, teachers and governors. I spoke with representative from the local authority. You and I visited classes to observe learning and looked at work in pupils' books. I met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with seven parents in the playground before school. I considered the 32 responses and the 28 'free-text' comments made by parents on the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I heard several pupils read and observed pupils in the playground and in the dining hall.

I conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking on the school's policies, procedures and record keeping. I talked with you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. I also considered a range of other documentation, including school-improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.