

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 July 2017

Mrs M Sharpe
Acting Headteacher
St Columba's Catholic Primary School
Church Lane
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA14 3AD

Dear Mrs Sharpe

Short inspection of St Columba's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been many staffing changes in recent years, which leaders have managed well. Governors have established a strong leadership team successfully while the headteacher is on maternity leave. They are rightly confident with leadership capacity within the school and support you effectively. It was evident during the inspection that you have quickly established yourself in your new role and are providing dynamic leadership.

This is an ambitious school with a strong focus on maintaining a Catholic ethos to strengthen the curriculum. You and your staff have created an inclusive ethos where pupils' academic and personal development are equally important. Governors spoke about their vision for pupils at the school. The desire of all leaders is that pupils' skills are developed across the wider curriculum and they leave St Columba's as confident, resilient learners. During the inspection, we discussed the wider curriculum, particularly the foundation subjects. You recognise that standards in these subjects are good, but not as strong as those in English and mathematics.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and wear their uniform with pride. They develop good learning behaviours and grow in confidence in your friendly, welcoming and supportive school. Pupils are extremely polite and well-mannered. They are articulate and express their views and opinions clearly. They listen well and respect other people's ideas. Their attitudes to learning are highly positive, as can be seen in their diligence in class and in the high quality of presentation in books. Their work

is also celebrated through vibrant and colourful wall displays. Staff and pupils get on well together. The atmosphere in lessons and outside is calm. In lessons and around school, pupils are well behaved and listen well to instructions. Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive. As one pupil commented, 'Everyone is kind to each other.'

The school is at the heart of the community and is highly regarded by parents. The majority of parents who spoke to me and responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive about the school. As one parent commented, 'This school stands out from other local primary schools. The sense of community is outstanding, the way the children are involved with the church and members of the parish builds such strong life skills that will stick with them forever. The children are taught strong morals and have a high standard of manners and behaviour.'

The previous inspection identified mathematics as an area for development. Pupils, particularly the most able, needed more opportunities to learn independently using their basic skills to investigate issues and solve problems. The mathematics leader has developed teaching and learning across the school. Staff have targeted training and they receive regular guidance on how to improve their teaching. Evidence from lessons and pupils' books demonstrates that pupils now have many opportunities to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills. Pupils told me that their favourite subject was mathematics because they enjoyed how challenging it was. This mirrors your survey with key stage 2 pupils to ascertain their favourite lessons. There is no sense of complacency though, and you and other leaders recognise that there is still work to be done across the school. In particular, a focus should remain on improving further pupils' achievement at greater depth in mathematics in key stage 1.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed, of a high quality and reflect the most recent changes to government legislation. There is a strong culture of keeping children safe in school. Staff receive regular training updates and know how to alert leaders to any concerns that they have. All staff take their roles and responsibilities seriously. You work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe and families are supported. Those who are responsible for recruitment have completed training at the appropriate level. Leaders conduct checks on staff when they are recruited to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

The vast majority of parents I spoke with, including those who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View', felt that their children were safe. All pupils whom I spoke with said that they feel safe at school and that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff would help them if they did have a problem.

Inspection findings

- You are ambitious for all pupils and are determined that all pupils should excel. Staff have been galvanised into taking a consistent approach to teaching and

learning across the school. Assessment procedures ensure that teachers are accountable for the progress that pupils make. Assessments are used accurately so that pupils stay on track. The school's collaborative and professional culture ensures that teachers and teaching assistants learn from each other and share what is working well.

- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and priorities for further improvement. These are clearly outlined in the school's self-evaluation and development plan. You and the governors are continually looking for ways to improve the school and underperformance is challenged. This is reflected in the way that leaders responded swiftly to a recent dip in standards, particularly in writing and mathematics, and put strategies in place to address these. As a result, the school's information on pupils' performance clearly shows that from their starting points, most pupils are making good progress and achieve well. You, your staff and governors are aspirational for pupils' learning and set high expectations for pupils' achievement.
- Children make an excellent start to their education in the early years. This area is well resourced and provides an exciting and stimulating learning environment for children. In Reception, the most able children's work demonstrated excellent progress and skills above those expected for their age, especially in reading and writing.
- The improvements made to the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics and reading across the school have ensured that achievement at the higher standard improved in 2017. In mathematics, the most able pupils are challenged to use their skills and knowledge to solve written problems and to then explain their reasoning. As a result, pupils' achievement at the higher standard in mathematics was much higher than in 2016. Improving the achievement of the most able in reading at key stage 2 has remained a priority. Leaders have invested in a variety of new texts to engage pupils further in their learning. As a result, achievement at the higher standard has risen. Progress and achievement for the most able in key stage 1 has improved since 2016, especially in writing. However, you have correctly identified that there is more to do to improve achievement at the higher standard in mathematics. In most year groups, teachers have high expectations, which pupils rise to. However, this is not yet consistent across the school. Consequently, some most-able pupils are not provided with the challenge they need to reach the standards they are capable of.
- The number of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check declined in 2016, especially for disadvantaged pupils. You acted swiftly to remedy this. The leader of phonics implemented additional training for staff. Regular checks are made on pupils' progress and extra teaching sessions take place where pupils make slower progress. It is clear that a high proportion of children in Reception are already learning phonics at a level that would be expected in Year 1. As a result of these improvements, the proportion of pupils who passed the phonics check this year increased. All disadvantaged pupils passed the phonics check this year.

- In 2016, Year 2 pupils did not perform as well as their peers nationally in writing and mathematics. You identified this and implemented a number of strategies to improve this situation. Adults support pupils effectively. They ask questions to deepen learning and encourage pupils to challenge themselves. As a result of the improvements to teaching and learning, alongside systematic checking of progress, Year 2 achievement in 2017 is stronger. Information provided by leaders and work in pupils' books shows that more pupils are now achieving the standards expected of them.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is shown by their good attendance. You have established effective systems to monitor pupils' attendance. You know pupils and families well and work closely with them, engaging support from external agencies when necessary. Consequently, as a result of these targeted actions, absence and persistent absence has reduced since 2016 and is now in line with the national average.
- Pupils enjoy having the opportunity to take on positions of responsibility. The school places high importance on the role that pupils play in school improvement. There are different pupil leadership committees which make decisions and effect change. For example, a committee recently attended a governors' meeting to ask what governors were going to do about a concern they had. Within another committee, they were able to select reading texts for the library that pupils wanted. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of democracy and take pride in all aspects of school life.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- most-able pupils are challenged appropriately in all classes so that more pupils achieve greater depth in their learning
- pupils develop knowledge skills and understanding more rapidly in subjects other than English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Kynaston
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, nine pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 and three members of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I spoke with the English, phonics and

mathematics leaders. I spoke to a teaching assistant. I visited classrooms with you to observe teaching and learning, look at pupils' work and speak to pupils. I took account of the 78 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View', including 79 free-text responses. I spoke to six parents as they dropped children off at school. Documents were scrutinised, including the record to check the suitability of new staff, the school's self-evaluation document, the school's improvement plan, external audits and governors' minutes. I also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe, records of training and attendance information. I reviewed pupils' achievement records and your checks on the quality of teaching.