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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Leigh-Anne Young
Headteacher
St Bede's RC Primary School
Howlett Hall Road
Denton Burn
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE15 7HS

Dear Mrs Young

Short inspection of St Bede's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following the recent retirement of the previous long-standing headteacher, you have skilfully steered the school through a period of uncertainty and instability. You have ensured that the absence of a number of members of staff has had minimal impact on the quality of teaching in school. You have also overseen the successful recruitment of a new deputy headteacher. Parents hold you in high regard. It is clear that you know the school extremely well. You are open and honest about the school's strengths, but also the areas in which improvements are needed. The school improvement plan is detailed and clear, and tackles areas of weakness head-on. You are already having a positive effect by planning and setting in motion actions which will improve pupils' learning experiences. These include an ongoing review and overhaul of the curriculum to ensure that subject-specific skills are planned and taught effectively, as well as developing teachers' and pupils' understanding of links between subjects.

Over time, pupils have achieved well, especially at the end of Year 6. In published statutory data, the proportion of pupils reaching standards expected for their age or working at a greater depth of learning has been above that found nationally. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development in early years has been steadily rising and is now also above that found nationally. Although new systems are in place to assess and track current pupils' progress and achievement, you acknowledge that assessments need to be completed more regularly and that further work is required to ensure that they fully inform teachers of pupils' progress.

The difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and both their classmates and other pupils nationally is diminishing. You acknowledge that it has been very difficult for leaders to assess whether additional support for disadvantaged pupils made possible by the pupil premium grant has been effective because assessments were not sufficiently robust. You now have detailed plans that show exactly what support is provided, but systems are too new to make a judgement about whether or not they are effective.

You have generated a strong sense of teamwork amongst all staff and created a shared vision to improve all experiences for pupils. You have eradicated many weaknesses and have developed buoyant staff morale. Over time, the school has worked hard to make the improvements suggested by the previous inspection report, through increasing the proportion of high-quality teaching. As that entire teaching team is now no longer in post, the urgency to ensure that pupils benefit from teaching of the highest quality remains. In classes, there is a calm and purposeful working environment in which pupils are clearly motivated to succeed and give of their best. They enjoy an orderly school environment, and high-quality displays in classrooms and shared areas. Most pupils are set work that challenges them appropriately. Work in books shows a wide range of areas covered in mathematics, and in different subjects across the curriculum. You acknowledge that the skills of teachers in leading a curricular subject require significant development.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Under the watchful eye of all staff at your inclusive school, no stone is left unturned to ensure that all pupils are safe and have opportunities to thrive. Work completed by the parental support adviser is having a significantly positive impact on pupils' well-being and attendance. The curriculum supports pupils well in maintaining their own safety. Pupils have full trust in their teachers and teaching assistants who look after them, and report feeling safe all of the time. They are especially knowledgeable about keeping safe online and how to stay safe when not at school. They were able to discuss issues such as road safety and 'stranger danger' confidently.

Staff and governor safeguarding training is up to date, including training to ensure that recruitment procedures are watertight. All procedures and records are of good quality and are regularly updated and reviewed by the senior leadership team. An extensive and detailed online system ensures that absolutely nothing is missed that may affect pupils' safety and well-being. Access to well-written policies and guidance ensures that all adults have a secure understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils.

Inspection findings

- Ensuring pupils' well-being, safety and personal development has been one of your highest priorities. Almost straight away, you worked with a safeguarding

consultant to conduct an in-depth audit and analysis of safeguarding in school. Policies and procedures have been reviewed and updated, staff training completed and systems to report and record any concerns enhanced. All staff have access to upload even the smallest concern regarding a child's well-being onto the online system, providing an accurate history and a chronology of events.

- You have overhauled the school's approach to managing pupils' behaviour, making sure that it has a positive and supportive emphasis rather than a negative approach that concentrated on misdemeanours. Pupils value the green and yellow cards that encourage them to give of their best. They happily play and work together, older pupils supporting younger pupils at breaktime to use the newly purchased equipment. The developing work and reputation of the parental support adviser has been important in supporting pupils and families, as well as maintaining the school's high levels of attendance – one of the highest in the country.
- Over time, there have been a wide range of support programmes for pupils at risk of falling behind in their learning, including for disadvantaged pupils. You acknowledge that differences still remain in their rates of progress and standards of achievement compared to other pupils nationally and compared to their classmates. It is clear from work seen in books and your own increasingly robust assessment information that these differences are quickly diminishing as the quality of teaching in lessons improves. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in school also appears to be falling, with small numbers in some year groups.
- You acknowledge that it has been difficult for governors to hold leaders to account regarding the effective use of the pupil premium grant to support disadvantaged pupils' learning. This has been because assessment systems were not sufficiently robust to judge whether progress had been made during support programmes. You have very recently addressed this issue, but consequently current progress data is not yet available. Similarly, ongoing assessments made by teachers and the tracking of this information are under development, including making assessments on a more regular basis. You acknowledge that there is much more work to be completed in this area.
- You have managed, and continue to manage, significant changes to leadership and staffing. You do so sensitively and with an experienced hand in order to minimise any potential disruption to pupils' learning. You have been proactive in addressing entrenched weaknesses, and respond immediately to any newly identified weaknesses. You have set in motion a detailed review and overhaul of the curriculum in order to ensure that it is rooted in an understanding of the links between key concepts that underpin different curricular areas. In addition, you acknowledge the need to ensure that subject-specific skills are planned and taught to allow pupils to build upon previous knowledge. A major part of curriculum developments will be to equip subject leaders with the skills that will enable them to drive improvements in their subjects, as well as evaluate and monitor the quality of provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- current tracking systems are further refined and fully embedded to allow leaders access to accurate information on the attainment and the rates of progress that individuals and groups of pupils make in their learning across school
- accurate information is available to show clearly whether support and intervention programmes to support pupils' learning are effective
- skills of subject leaders are substantially strengthened to allow them to drive improvements and effectively monitor provision in their subjects
- the current curriculum review results in the planning, teaching and assessment of subject specific skills and develops teachers' understanding of links between subjects.

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 Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the acting deputy headteacher, a phase leader and three subject leaders. I also met with the administration officer and the parental support adviser. In addition, I met a group of governors, a number of parents and the school improvement partner. Alongside you, I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks in lessons. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime. A range of documents was considered relating to safeguarding. I examined the school development plan, the school's monitoring of its own performance and its assessment and tracking of current pupils' progress and attainment. I also scrutinised pupils' achievement in the 2016 and 2017 statutory assessments, the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, Parent View, and the school's website. The inspection was quality assured by a senior Her Majesty's Inspector.