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Miss Maria Elliott
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Dear Miss Elliott

Short inspection of English Martyrs' RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 October 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.

Since your appointment as headteacher two years ago, you have acted quickly to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning and build a richer, more engaging curriculum. The impact of your work is now being seen in better rates of progress and higher academic standards at the end of key stage 2. Although good progress has been made, you are not complacent at all. You know that further improvements are needed to ensure that pupils make even better progress and more go on to attain higher standards by the end of Year 6. You continue to challenge and support your teachers, who told me that they feel more empowered and confident to take risks. You have re-shaped the senior leadership team and are developing middle leaders who increasingly share their expertise and good practice with their colleagues. Parents recognise that English Martyrs' RC Primary is a much improved school. They know that the quality of teaching is better and that the support provided for individual pupils, such as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, makes a real difference to their progress at school. An overwhelming majority of parents would recommend the school.

In the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching and raise standards in writing. However, when you joined the school in 2015, you found that teaching required improvement and standards of writing were still variable.

Since then, you have improved the quality of teaching through well-focused training opportunities that have increased teachers' skills and knowledge of national curriculum expectations. You and other leaders have made more frequent checks on teaching and provided teachers with more regular feedback. You have skilfully moved teachers around to create new teams in each phase of the school. Phase leaders are having an increasingly positive influence, ensuring that lesson planning is appropriately challenging and checking on pupils' books to see whether progress is rapid enough.

Standards in writing have also improved. Clearer policies, a tighter focus on the technical aspects of grammar, punctuation and spelling, and the introduction of more creative topics that encourage pupils to write have all helped. Provisional teacher assessments for 2017 show that standards in writing improved to be above the national average by the end of Year 6. Pupils' attainment in the national curriculum spelling, punctuation and grammar test was also securely above the national average at both the expected and higher standard. Good opportunities to share practice across the school have ensured that the improvements made to the teaching of writing are likely to be sustained.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe and parents are confident that their children are safe. This is because safeguarding and child protection are given a high priority and their importance is made very visible in displays around the site and on the school website. You make all necessary checks on adults who work in or visit the school and ensure that up-to-date training is provided for all members of staff and governors. Staff know what actions to take if they have a concern about a child's welfare or safety. You have good systems in place to record information, and you act swiftly to ensure that action is taken to protect vulnerable children, in partnership with external agencies.

A strength of the school is the contribution made by the family support worker. Her positive profile within the local community means that she is well placed to support vulnerable pupils and their families. This work makes a positive contribution to levels of attendance and pupils' mental health. She is skilled at supporting families at times of crisis and signposting them to the sources of specialist support.

You ensure that induction arrangements for teachers new to the school cover all aspects of safeguarding and child protection. New teachers are confident and well informed about safeguarding policies and procedures and understand the need to be vigilant.

Inspection findings

- This is an improving school. Members of staff describe you as 'inspirational' and 'the type of headteacher you want to do your best for'. You are empowering your staff, fostering teamwork and raising everyone's expectations. Your thoughtful, strategic leadership is also having a positive impact. Each member of the re-structured senior leadership team is clear about their responsibilities and effective in their role. Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is now targeted effectively. Provisional results for 2017 across the school show that different groups of pupils all made good progress and differences in attainment between groups of pupils have diminished.
- During the inspection, I looked closely at the quality of early years provision, as outcomes have been variable over recent years. I found that the Nursery and Reception classrooms are well resourced and well led. Adults make detailed assessments of children to establish their starting points and plan an appropriate curriculum to meet their needs. These assessments show that, in recent years, the majority of children have entered the school with skills below those expected for their age. Around a third of children currently in Nursery and Reception speak English as an additional language. Consequently, leaders have made speech and language development the top priority and adapted teaching to ensure that children receive the level of support they need. Children in Reception Year take part enthusiastically and develop a secure understanding of the sounds that letters represent. Last year, 70% of children in Reception Year attained the expected standard, in line with the national average. However, children currently in the Reception class entered the school with lower starting points and weaker language skills. It was good to see classrooms are now packed with word-based displays and other resources to stimulate children's interest in communication and language. However, the outdoor space is less stimulating and does not contribute as effectively to children's language development, as there are fewer displays or resources to encourage their speech or to broaden their vocabulary.
- Pupils make secure progress across key stage 1. Regular teaching of phonics helps most pupils develop the skills to decode new words effectively. Outcomes in the national phonics screening check have been in line with the national average in recent years. However, some classrooms do not provide an environment which is sufficiently rich in language to fully support and stretch pupils' learning. When we visited lessons, we noticed that some pupils, particularly those who speak English as an additional language, struggled to infer deeper meaning from text and some teachers did not give pupils enough time to talk to one another and develop their ideas before answering questions. When I listened to pupils read, I also noted that some pupils' understanding of their books was uncertain and they missed some of the subtleties in stories.
- Rates of progress accelerate across key stage 2. Provisional results for the end of key stage 2 show that the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. As yet, however, the proportion attaining the higher standard is no better than average. This is because teachers did not stretch the most able pupils sufficiently in the

past. You now use assessment information to hold your teachers more tightly to account for the progress of different groups. As a result, their planning has sharpened up and the work they set for the most able pupils is more challenging. Older pupils with the ability to attain the higher standards now receive extra specialist mathematics lessons from secondary school teachers. Current tracking data indicates that more pupils are on track this year to attain the higher standard at the end of Year 6.

- I also looked closely at the work of the governing body, as your own self-evaluation indicated that governors had, in the past, provided insufficient scrutiny and challenge. Under the leadership of the current chair of the governing body, governors are more active. They make regular visits to look at the impact of actions in the school improvement plan and call senior and middle leaders to report to their meetings. Governors are benefiting from the coaching you provide and are well informed because you share with them more comprehensive information about the school's performance. They have undertaken more training and consequently use published performance data to challenge more effectively. They have made significant improvements to the way the pupil premium funding is spent and have good systems in place to check that it is making a difference. Their skills are still developing, however. For example, they do not make enough use of assessment information to check on the progress of all pupils across the year. Doing so would ensure that any underperformance is spotted sooner and that you and other leaders respond immediately.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further improvements are made to the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers in early years and key stage 1 more actively promote speaking and listening and pupils' acquisition of language
 - fostering pupils' enjoyment of books and reading for pleasure.
- the most able pupils are consistently stretched so that a higher proportion of pupils attain the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2
- governors make more systematic use of tracking data across the year and ensure that leaders quickly intervene to address any slower progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and the director of children's services for Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, a group of teachers, a representative of the local authority and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together we visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the impact of your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits, I sampled some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' work with the literacy and numeracy coordinators, in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I also walked around the school to meet pupils informally and observed their behaviour and conduct. I met with a group of parents and looked at the 67 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). I also considered the 16 responses to the staff survey and 27 responses to the pupil survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, external test results and other information available on the school website.