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Mrs Sharon McQuiggin
Headteacher
Blessed John Duckett Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary
Smith Street
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Dear Mrs McQuiggin

Short inspection of Blessed John Duckett Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary

Following my visit to the school on 20 October 2016, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, you and your governors have successfully managed a number of changes to staff and leadership. You now have in place a stable staffing profile and the leadership capacity to develop the school further. Working alongside the deputy headteacher, governors and other school leaders, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for further improvement. These are clearly outlined in the school's self-evaluation and development plan. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your staff have created an inclusive ethos where pupils' academic and personal development are equally important. Pupils develop good learning behaviours and grow in confidence in your friendly, welcoming and supportive school. You, your staff and governors are aspirational for pupils' learning and set high expectations for pupils' achievement. For example, your prompt analysis of the 2016 key stage 2 results has helped to identify the actions needed to improve pupils' progress further, particularly in mathematics.

You have taken decisive actions to improve the two areas for improvement identified at your last inspection. Firstly, you and your staff are working hard to provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop confidence in using problem solving and reasoning skills in their mathematics lessons. Pupil progress information

for current pupils and the work in their books shows that they are making good progress in these areas, along with their arithmetic skills. This is helping higher proportions of pupils to be working at the standards expected for their age. On occasions, opportunities to deepen learning for the most able pupils are not as well developed. You have detailed plans to continue improvements in mathematics teaching, including appropriate training for staff and links with other schools. You agree that this remains a work in progress and an area for continued focus for your school.

You, your deputy headteacher and governors have taken effective action to improve the consistency of teaching across the school. Your well-structured recruitment approaches, performance management systems and staff training all have a positive impact upon improving the quality of teaching. For example, the improvements in phonics teaching have ensured a year-on-year improvement in the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screen check.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors afford a high priority to keeping pupils safe. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Your safeguarding policy is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is up to date. Careful checks are carried out for all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff have received safeguarding training and know what to do should they have any concerns. You, your staff and a number of governors have received training on the 'Prevent' duty. This has improved your confidence in dealing with the risks related to extremism and radicalisation. School leaders respond swiftly to all safeguarding issues.

Pupils are taught effectively about how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and know who they can talk to if they ever have concerns. Pupils say that incidents of bullying are rare in their school. Your detailed school records show that incidents of misbehaviour and bullying are infrequent and that these are quickly addressed by the staff. Pupils and parents agree that behaviour at the school is good. There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere around school.

Inspection findings

- You, your leaders and governors have rigorous approaches to checking the quality of teaching and learning and the impact this has upon pupils' learning. You take prompt action to ensure that high-quality teaching is maintained and that most pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Recently appointed subject leaders have a good understanding of development priorities in English and mathematics. They have begun to take effective actions to improve pupils' outcomes and to check to see if these are having the required impact. You have established a useful programme of training and development to ensure that they further develop the skills to drive improvement in these subjects.

- The governing body has a clear understanding of the school's priorities and the impact of actions taken to improve pupils' achievement. Governors receive relevant training which improves their skills. Well-established links with school leaders, including visits into school, assist governors' understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. As a result, governors provide well-balanced support and challenge to school leaders.
- Teachers are providing many opportunities for pupils to solve mathematical problems. For example, in one lesson that we visited, pupils of all abilities read their problem and then presented their solutions to their peers. This approach is beginning to improve pupils' confidence in explaining their work and to deepen their mathematical understanding.
- The teaching of phonics is well structured and teaching is carefully matched to the pupils' level of development. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are achieving the expected standard has been above that found nationally for the last two years. Younger pupils can use their phonics to good effect when reading new words or unfamiliar words.
- Your systems for measuring and recording pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics are generating useful information. Staff are using this information with increasing confidence to support teaching and identify gaps in pupils' learning. Regular reviews are enabling you to respond promptly if pupils are no longer on track to achieve at least the expectations for their age. You recognise that these systems could be further refined to provide you with a sharper analysis of the most able pupils' progress.
- You have put in place actions to improve levels of attendance and these are now much closer to the national average. You have raised the profile of having good attendance across the school and this work with pupils and parents is having a positive impact.
- Adult-led teaching of number and phonics in Nursery and Reception is well matched to children's needs and interests. As a result, children are engaged, keen to learn and make good progress from their starting points. The indoor learning provision is well organised to support children's independent learning. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development is above that found nationally and the vast majority of children are well prepared for starting in Year 1.
- The school benefited from short-term additional local authority support during the – now resolved – recent period of staff and leadership instability.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the plans to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics are fully implemented, including ensuring that the most able pupils are provided with work which will enable them to work at depth
- the leadership skills of the recently appointed English and mathematics subject leaders are further developed.

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 and adult services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and the deputy headteacher. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held discussions with a representative of the local authority and with seven governors who were able to provide me with additional information. I also took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information published on the school website. I considered the 28 responses to the parent questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered your analysis of the school's most recent parent questionnaire. Alongside you, I visited three classes to observe teaching and learning. We looked at pupils' mathematics work from all classes to help us evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also considered.

This inspection particularly focused upon the following aspects of the school's work:

- leaders and governors impact on addressing areas for improvement in the previous inspection report
- the quality of teaching learning and assessment in mathematics and phonics; and current pupils' progress in these subjects
- the impact of leaders and staff actions to improve pupils' attendance levels
- children's progress in early years.