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31 January 2017

Mrs Jary  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Washington RC School  
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Tyne and Wear  
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Dear Mrs Jary

### **Short inspection of St Joseph's Washington RC School**

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 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 December 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your staff and governors continue to live up to St Joseph's mission statement, 'to provide a caring and learning community in which the contribution of each is recognised and developed', as an expression of your Catholic faith. Pupils behave and achieve well and develop into well-rounded young people during their time in school. They are prepared successfully for the rigours of secondary school and to be thoughtful and responsible citizens in Britain today. You are determined to provide equal opportunities for all of your pupils. Where differences in varying groups of pupils' achievements appear, you tackle them swiftly. As a result, there is little variation in the progress of different groups of pupils currently in the school.

You have addressed the areas that were identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection effectively. For example, you and your deputy headteacher have been resolute in ensuring that teaching is at least good so that pupils make good progress in their learning. You both check regularly learning in lessons, pupils' progress in their workbooks and outcomes of the regular assessments of pupils' work. Outcomes of such reviews are now better used to target support and training to help improve any weaker practice in teaching. Following a dip in writing last year, you have rectified the situation. The impact of your higher expectations of pupils' writing is clear to see, in the vibrant displays of pupils' written work that adorn corridors and classroom walls and in pupils' workbooks across the school.

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be a strength. It contributes to the caring atmosphere in school, pupils' good behaviour and attitudes and prepares them well for their future lives. The curriculum and the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer are highly effective in ensuring that pupils are safe, enjoy school and have the wide range of experiences they need to determine their ambitions for the future. Pupils report how much they enjoy the topic-based curriculum that sits alongside the English, mathematics and religious education curriculums. They say the topics enable them to study subjects such as history, geography, science and the arts in an exciting and interesting way. You know there is more to do to ensure that the most able pupils in such subjects are challenged consistently to achieve their best.

Your accurate evaluation of the school's work leads to clear action plans for improvement. Issues are tackled robustly. For example, you were aware last year that not as many pupils achieved as highly as they should, given their generally broadly average starting points into school. You also recognised that disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as other pupils. You redoubled your efforts to improve matters this year and current assessments show the strong difference your actions have made. Governance remains strong. Governors' good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses ensures that they hold you and your staff to account effectively for the impact of your work. You, your deputy headteacher and governors were disappointed by some of the responses to Ofsted's parent and carer inspection questionnaire because they were so different to those you get from your own surveys of parental views. You are already making plans to meet with parents to get to the bottom of this.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You, as designated safeguarding lead, and the designated safeguarding governors are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe in school and understand how they can keep themselves safe in their communities and online. You take prompt action in referring any safeguarding concerns to appropriate agencies. Records of discussions and actions taken are meticulously kept. Staff are well trained to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns or disclosures made by pupils. Staff benefit from termly training which goes beyond the Department for Education's minimum requirements. This ensures that they keep abreast of pertinent issues arising from serious case reviews, changes in statutory guidance or emerging safeguarding concerns in the local or wider community.

### **Inspection findings**

- You, your team and governors have a good understanding of what is working well in school and what needs to improve, and you take robust action where needed. For example, you were aware last year that not as many Year 6 pupils achieved as highly as you had wished, given their generally broadly average starting points into school. You also found that disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as other pupils, particularly in writing. You have improved matters

this year. Now, pupils write for many different purposes and have opportunities to draft, redraft and refine their work against the high expectations you set for them. Work is well presented and of good quality. This includes the work of disadvantaged pupils.

- You have increased your expectations of the level of challenge teachers provide to the most able pupils in English and mathematics lessons. You are aware that this challenge needs to be extended to pupils' topic work. In order to ensure that more pupils achieve at greater depth in mathematics, you have made significant changes to the way that the subject is taught. Pupils are benefiting from the additional challenge and interesting problems and tasks that they now undertake.
- Current assessment information shows the differences this focus has made. For example, in Year 6 more pupils are achieving at greater depth than at the same time last year in reading, writing and mathematics. Some differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school remain, but these have diminished significantly.
- Assessment procedures to measure pupils' progress have improved. Teachers use assessment information to plan learning that usually moves pupils on well from their varied starting points. You have improved your approach to identify pupils at risk of falling behind. This means that extra support is put in place rapidly to tackle concepts that they may be struggling with.
- Children in the early years get off to a flying start and make good progress as they move through Nursery and Reception classes. The proportion of children gaining a good level of development has been above average for the past three years. Learning journals, children's workbooks and displays showcase the range of high-quality work that they complete.
- Last year, too many disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were persistently absent. You are taking a range of actions to tackle this. There is a strong focus on celebrating high attendance and pupils like this. You also have meetings with parents when attendance starts to slip. As a result, attendance rates have improved and are currently above average. Hardly any disadvantaged pupils have been persistently absent this year.
- As a result of the parent and carer inspection survey, you have noted the areas of concern and are planning meetings with parents to understand their issues and move forward with them. Virtually all parents who responded to the survey and who spoke to me at the end of the school day are clear that their children are well-taught, safe, enjoy school and are well cared for. While most parents report that behaviour is good, a minority think that bullying incidents are not tackled effectively. Pupils report, and your records show, that bullying incidents are rare and tackled robustly once you or a teacher is informed. Your detailed records identify the range of actions that you take.
- You and your team continue to look outward to improve the school further, working closely with your local partnership of Catholic primary schools to share good practice and learn from each other. The support you have secured from local authority specialists has contributed to the improvements in English and the developments in mathematics.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans to meet parents following the outcomes of the inspection survey are put in place so that you can understand their concerns and work with parents to tackle them
- teachers plan activities in topic work that challenge the most able pupils more consistently.

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 Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, some of the areas I focused on included:

- the extent to which safeguarding procedures are effective
- whether attendance rates have improved in the last year, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who receive additional school support
- the effectiveness of leaders' actions to ensure that more pupils achieve highly from their starting points.

I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss the impact of actions you are taking to continue to improve the school and to discuss safeguarding. We observed learning together in three classes and looked at pupils' workbooks and talked to pupils about their learning. I also held meetings with two representatives of the governing body and the local authority's school improvement officer. I talked to pupils on the yard and formally to a group of Year 6 pupils. I took account of the two responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, the two responses from the staff survey and 104 responses to Ofsted's parent and carer questionnaire, Parent View. I also spoke to 12 parents on the school yard at the end of the day. I scrutinised a number of documents, including a range of safeguarding documents, the school's written evaluation of its work and the school improvement plan. I also reviewed your most recent headteacher's report to governors and minutes from the last full governing body meeting.