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Mrs Valerie Douglass
Headteacher
St Philip Neri Roman Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Douglass

Short inspection of St Philip Neri Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 March 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 your school was judged to be good in April 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 are ambitious for your school and have developed a team of staff who share your vision to ensure that teaching excites and challenges pupils in all areas of the curriculum. You are well supported by a strong governing body who know the school well and who have the skills they need to hold you to account. The vast majority of parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and recognise your pivotal role in shaping the school's success. One parent's comment reflected the views expressed by others in Ofsted's online survey: 'The teaching team are always willing to go the extra mile and we wouldn't hesitate to recommend this school to other parents.'

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. During the inspection, when I visited Year 6, I could have heard a pin drop, such was the level of concentration as they wrote their articles about the discovery of 'Skellig'. This typifies pupils' exceptionally strong attitudes to learning across the school. Your work to improve pupils' handwriting has paid off and they take great care in presenting their work well. Pupils proudly informed me that, at St Philip Neri, 'no-one is left out' and that kindness is a quality they prize.

Since you joined the school in 2013, you have been relentless in driving improvements to the quality of teaching. More teaching is now securing outstanding progress from pupils, particularly in Year 2 and across key stage 2. The previous

inspection tasked leaders to increase the level of challenge for the most able pupils. In 2016, a higher proportion of pupils reached and exceeded the nationally expected levels at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Current pupils, including most-able pupils, in Year 2 and across key stage 2 are making very strong progress because teachers have high expectations of what they can do.

You have developed a strong team of leaders who help you to keep a close eye on the quality of teaching. Staff have plentiful opportunities to learn from each other and to see the best practice in other schools. You and your leaders check frequently to ensure that teaching is meeting your high expectations and provide detailed feedback to help teachers to improve. You recognise that this feedback could be more sharply focused on the progress made by different groups of pupils, such as boys and the least able pupils.

Improvements to the quality of provision in the early years and to the teaching of phonics have resulted in better outcomes for pupils. More pupils are now reaching the expected level at the end of the Reception Year and in the national phonics check at the end of Year 1. However, you know that there is more to do so that, in early years and Year 1, the most able and lower-attaining pupils, including boys and some disadvantaged pupils, make the more rapid progress which is typical in the rest of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training and demonstrate a good knowledge of recent safeguarding guidance. Governors take steps to assure themselves that the school's procedures are robust and effective. For example, they review the checks that leaders make on the suitability of adults to work with children. Pupils' good attendance has been maintained and you have tightened your monitoring of pupils' lateness, challenging parents to make sure their children attend school promptly.

Pupils feel safe in school. They report that bullying is very rare and that adults deal swiftly with any concerns they have. The curriculum supports pupils to consider risks to their safety and to take responsibility for their well-being. Pupil 'health and safety officers' take a lead role in assessing the school site and a pupil's recent letter to you, asking you to improve lighting outside the school on dark nights, was quickly addressed. This reflects the importance you place on listening to the views of your pupils.

Inspection findings

- In this inspection, I explored whether teachers were setting work at the right level for pupils, particularly the most able. Since the previous inspection, you and the deputy headteacher have led improvements to the curriculum for mathematics. Teachers have benefited from training and are now planning more opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving skills and to explain their reasoning. Pupils' books showed that in most classes, their work in mathematics

is forcing them to think deeply and apply their skills and knowledge. Teachers use questioning very effectively in lessons to check what pupils can do and shape the tasks they set for pupils to reflect this. As a result, particularly in Year 2 and across key stage 2, pupils, including the most able, are making strong progress and a greater proportion are working above the expected level for their age in mathematics.

- You have introduced a new and robust system to track the progress of every pupil meticulously. Teachers' assessments are carefully moderated across the school, and with other schools, to ensure that they are accurate. Your checks ensure that you, and the governing body, foresee any fluctuations in pupils' achievement. For example, you anticipated the dip in the standards achieved by pupils in Year 6 in 2016 and have a very thorough understanding of the factors that contributed to this. Your self-evaluation reflects, correctly, that the outcomes achieved by pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 are not typical of the achievement of pupils at your school.
- Since the previous inspection, you have refined your curriculum for teaching writing. Teachers plan activities based on high-quality texts which stimulate pupils' interest. Pupils are given enough time to immerse themselves in different genres of writing and to write with freedom so that they can begin to develop their own style. You are monitoring pupils' grammar work closely so that you can be assured they are also progressing well with their basic skills. Pupils' books indicate that standards continue to improve in writing and that a higher proportion of pupils are working at and beyond the expected standards for their age.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders, supported by the governing body, have secured more outstanding teaching and eradicated weaker teaching. Teachers appreciate the opportunities they have to watch each other teach and to visit other schools to see different practice. Leaders' frequent checks ensure that they are very aware of what has been improved and what is still to do. Teachers receive regular feedback from leaders on the quality of their teaching, although, at times, this does not focus sharply enough on the progress made by different groups of pupils. Teachers are held to account through regular progress meetings and with targets to manage their performance. Governors have also ensured that development plans are in place, with precise, measurable targets, so that they can carefully check on the impact of leaders' actions.
- One of my key areas of focus during this inspection was the achievement of boys, particularly in the early years. You have invested significantly in additional learning resources and training for staff in the early years. As a result, outcomes have improved over time with a higher proportion of children reaching the expected level of development at the end of the Reception Year. The proportion of boys reaching the expected level has also improved, but remains below the national average for all pupils. You have developed the curriculum to provide activities which engage boys, such as introducing more technology and improving outdoor learning. You have also focused staff's attention on developing the skills that children need to become effective learners. This is paying off. During the inspection, all children, including boys, were working well, together and independently, and sustained their concentration on activities. You know that, at

times, teaching does not demand enough of the most able children. In addition, some lower-attaining children, including some boys, do not make the more rapid progress needed to catch up to their peers. You are aware of this and have already begun to address the issue through coaching and support for staff.

- Leaders have introduced a new approach to phonics teaching which ensures systematic, daily teaching, complemented by additional support for pupils who need it. A broadly average proportion of pupils achieved the expected level in the national phonics check in Year 1 in 2016; a significant improvement compared to the previous two years. You recognise, however, that in both the Reception Year and in Year 1, the teaching of phonics could be improved further so that the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils make progress at a faster rate.
- Senior and middle leaders are highly effective in helping you to improve teaching and learning. The recently appointed leader for early years and key stage 1 has, already, brought about rapid improvements in the quality of the learning environment and in the breadth of the curriculum in early years. She is clear about what needs to improve, so that the most able and lower-ability pupils are challenged to make progress, in the Reception Year and in Year 1, at the same rapid rate as pupils in the rest of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in Reception and Year 1 classes, teaching challenges all pupils, including boys, lower-attaining pupils, the most able, and disadvantaged pupils, to make progress in reading (including phonics), writing and mathematics at the same rapid rate as pupils elsewhere in the school
- feedback to teachers, following lesson observations or scrutiny of pupils' work, focuses incisively on the impact of teaching on the progress made by different groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I also met with the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body and three other governors. I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils'

work. In two classrooms, I observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I met with a representative of the local authority. I spoke informally to groups of pupils during breaktime and in lessons. I scrutinised the work in pupils' books. I evaluated information in relation to pupils' progress, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. I reviewed the documentation linked to your work to keep pupils safe and examined the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 10 responses to the pupil questionnaire.