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Mrs Val Plant
Headteacher
St Bede's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Val Plant

Short inspection of St Bede's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 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.

You have led staff well since your appointment in January 2016, helping them to improve what they do so that pupils make better progress. You and your staff's commitment to making sure pupils develop well personally as well as academically demonstrates your ambition to prepare pupils well for the future.

Pupils are proud of their teachers and their school. Many told me that there are a lot of caring people in the school and always someone they can turn to. They described the staff as always positive and ready to help, especially if pupils are upset. They say that their teachers listen to them when they speak. St Bede's is a happy school where pupils' work, effort and behaviour are all celebrated in many ways, including in high-quality displays. Almost all parents agree that their children are happy at school, that they make good progress and that they behave well.

Pupils behave well. They have a good understanding of British values and of other faiths. They are excited about the upcoming mock election, for which they are preparing manifestos and learning how democracy works. You ensure that they are prepared for life in modern Britain but their knowledge of other cultures in Britain and the wider world is relatively limited. You acknowledge that this is an area which you need to develop further and have arranged a cultural week after half term to

begin the process.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching and to be more rigorous when checking it. You quickly identified where you needed to make improvements. The actions you have taken have helped other leaders to understand and fulfil their roles better, as well as helping staff to improve their teaching and, consequently, pupils' progress. There is a real feeling of teamwork in the school as staff work together to ensure that they understand the part each one of them plays in helping pupils to do well in Year 6. Your close working partnership with the Yarrow Teaching Alliance is benefiting everyone.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that secure safeguarding arrangements are in place and records are detailed and fit for purpose. Records show that any concerns, however minor, are logged and acted upon promptly and appropriately. A culture of vigilance exists throughout the school because you have ensured that safeguarding is a high priority for all staff. Policies and practices meet the latest statutory requirements and all training is up to date, including that for child protection, safer recruitment and first aid. Suitable risk assessments are carried out for all activities.

You ensure that pupils receive and understand guidance on potential risks. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet. You make sure that internet safety, including the use of mobile devices, is kept high on the school's agenda. Pupils particularly praised the scheme that staff use to help them understand and deal with potential dangers. They understand how different aspects of safety are covered at different levels so they are suitable for each age group. Pupils say that they feel safe at school, and nearly all parents agree that their children are safe and well looked after. The many pupils to whom I spoke are adamant that there is no bullying, although there is sometimes some falling-out. They have a strong sense of right and wrong. Attendance is above the national average and punctuality is good. Staff are vigilant in completing registers in time and checking up on all absences.

Inspection findings

- One of the key lines of enquiry to decide whether the school remained good focused on how successful you had been in raising standards in writing in key stage 2. Doing so had been identified as a priority at the previous inspection. In 2016, the test results had shown that boys and disadvantaged pupils had not done well. Your determination to improve writing, coupled with staff training and the appointment of an English specialist, have led to both groups making good progress this year.
- You have high expectations of staff and pupils and both are responding well to them. Pupils' books showed me that the difference between boys and girls is diminishing fast and disadvantaged pupils are doing much better than last year. Some boys even said that writing is now their favourite subject.
- The improvements have been brought about by a range of actions, for example:

using more challenging texts for all pupils; introducing more boy-friendly topics without putting girls off; and focusing on basic skills and applying them to all writing, including that done in subjects other than English. High-quality displays of writing provide good models and show the importance of skills like drafting and editing.

- Spelling, grammar and punctuation are mostly secure and pupils' vocabulary has widened. The careful build-up of skills prior to doing a piece of extended writing is ensuring that pupils know what they need to do to write well.
- As you acknowledged, despite all the hard work, there are still too few pupils working at greater depth. Although there is much good writing, it is sometimes too controlled by the very process that has helped to improve it. Pupils who can write well do not have enough opportunities to write more freely, develop their own style and become real writers.
- Another line of enquiry was to look at how well children in the Reception class were doing and whether the decline in outcomes up to 2016 had been halted and whether any improvement is sustainable. Here, too, there were problems with writing and with boys' achievement. You acted quickly to address them. The reorganisation of the Reception areas, indoors and out, with clear learning intentions for all activities, along with well-focused staff training, has brought about much improvement.
- Assessments made by staff were moderated externally the day before the inspection. They show that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has risen and the gap between boys and girls is closing.
- The learning areas are rich in opportunities for children to learn to speak, listen, read and write, as well as to develop their mathematical learning. Writing is improving rapidly.
- A third line of enquiry was to look at whether phonics had improved and whether any improvement was sustainable. Pupils confidently recognise and say letters and sounds. They use their knowledge well when reading and to help them spell.
- While spelling is sometimes incorrect, it is often phonetically accurate. The strength of phonics knowledge coming through from Reception bodes well for the future.
- My final line of enquiry was to look at how well writing is promoted in different subjects, and how well skills in subjects other than English and mathematics were being taught and assessed. Writing is equally good in all subjects because staff have ensured that pupils remember to use their writing skills always. There are some examples of pupils beginning to write in their own styles in science, as they predict, investigate, draw conclusions and then consider whether their predictions were accurate.
- Subject leaders have made a good start on systems to help staff assess progression in skills accurately in all subjects. Using the statements from the national curriculum programmes of study, they have made sure that learning objectives focus on developing skills. For example, pupils undertake research in history using secondary sources and learn to separate fact from opinion.

- The curriculum is planned well. Pupils reported that learning is exciting because teachers make it fun. They thoroughly enjoy learning. The enthusiasm and enjoyment that pupils in Year 6 demonstrated in their Young Enterprise work was a joy to behold. The pupils talked animatedly about the life skills they were acquiring through having to make decisions, solve problems, manage a budget and, crucially, make a profit at the end.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils achieve greater depth in writing by allowing those capable of doing so to write more freely, develop their own style and become real writers
- pupils are given more opportunities to develop their understanding of British and wider world cultures.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you throughout the day. We talked about the improvements that had been made since the previous inspection and since you arrived at the school in January 2016. I also considered your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I examined all safeguarding records, including those relating to attendance, and explored your recruitment and vetting procedures. I held discussions with four middle leaders, four governors and a representative of the local authority. Together, you and I visited a range of English lessons and, while visiting these lessons, sampled literacy, extended writing and topic books. I held a formal discussion with around 10 pupils and talked to many others informally in the playground. I also listened to pupils in Year 1 read. I took account of the 45 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and spoke with around 20 parents at the end of the school day. I also considered the 43 responses to the online questionnaire for pupils and the four responses to the online questionnaire for staff.