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Mr Derek Sutherland
Executive Headteacher
St Aelred's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Fifth Avenue
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Dear Mr Sutherland

Short inspection of St Aelred's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 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 arrival as executive headteacher in September 2015 you have been unrelenting in your drive to improve the quality of education at the school. To achieve this you have worked extremely closely with staff and governors to sustain a real sense of teamwork and an ethos in which pupils can thrive. The rapid improvement in teaching and the standards pupils achieve is down to a strong collaboration from all those connected to the school.

You and your leaders, including governors, have an effective understanding of the strengths in the school and are quick to tackle areas for development. You very quickly identified that your staff need to look beyond the school to develop their practice. You have ensured, and continue to ensure, that staff receive high-quality training and support which is having a significant impact on the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils are making. Staff have embraced these opportunities with great relish and have worked closely with other schools and as part of a research project to develop and improve their practice. The difference this has made to pupils' outcomes, particularly in writing, and the support for younger pupils who have a range of complex needs, is quite impressive.

You were quite rightly disappointed with pupils' outcomes when you arrived at the school and that 2016 results showed no improvement. However, you have been resolute in addressing this, and along with leaders and staff have shown great

determination in ensuring that teaching and learning rapidly improve. Evidence collected during the inspection clearly identifies the good progress that current pupils are making and the good standards that they are achieving in reading, writing and mathematics.

You have worked particularly hard in stabilising and developing the leadership of the school. Senior and middle leaders now have the confidence and the expertise to drive the school on a journey of improvement. The governing body are effective and are ambitious for the school. They know the school very well and play a vital role in its strategic direction. They are in school regularly and they provide you and your staff with an appropriate balance of challenge and support.

Pupils enjoy learning at the school because teachers plan interesting activities that stimulate their curiosity and challenge them to make good progress. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent; pupils in classes are settled in a productive environment and their lessons proceed without disruption.

As a result of actions you have taken since the last inspection, pupils are applying their writing and mathematical skills in different subjects effectively, especially in their written work. You have also ensured that teachers have the appropriate skills to provide challenging activities that are mostly set at the right level and make pupils think hard about what they are learning. You have also developed very robust procedures to track pupils' progress, and you and your leaders are quick to act on any underperformance.

The quality of teaching in mathematics has vastly improved, which is clearly evident in pupils' books. Pupils are applying their arithmetic skills very effectively to more-complex problems and investigation. However, you agreed that pupils are sometimes not moved onto more challenging activities during lessons when they are ready to do so. Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 have rapidly improved for pupils attaining the expected standard. However, you and your leaders rightly acknowledge that a larger proportion needs to attain a greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are given the highest priority and are fit for purpose. Records are well organised and accurate. You and your staff are vigilant and ensure that nothing is left to chance in matters relating to the safety and well-being of all the children in your school. The school is a safe and caring environment.

Staff training is up to date, and staff demonstrate knowledge of how to report concerns about pupils' welfare. When necessary, you work effectively with external agencies to support your pupils' needs. The pupils at your school know how to keep themselves safe. They are taught about safety in the curriculum and how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. You have strong and positive relationships with parents and have built a good level of trust. Your drop-in sessions each Friday

morning provide parents with good opportunities to share their concerns with your staff and receive valuable information from specialist speakers.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection I focused on what actions leaders have taken to:
 - improve reading outcomes in the early years and key stage 1
 - ensure that disadvantaged pupils are given the support they need to attain higher standards in key stage 2
 - improve outcomes in writing and mathematics for those pupils in key stage 2 who have average starting points.
- Through highly effective professional development, the teaching of reading, including the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent), has significantly improved. As a result, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, in key stage 1, has shown a significant increase on the previous year. Pupils who read to me talked confidently about what they had read and could use decoding strategies well to read unfamiliar words.
- The proportion of children in the early years who have complex needs has increased and is currently unusually high. Although the number of children reading at the expected standard for their age is not improving, from their low starting points they are nevertheless making good progress. This is because they receive excellent support in the early years from dedicated staff.
- You recognised that the proportion of disadvantaged pupils making good progress and attaining the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016 was unacceptably low. You quickly reacted to this by appointing a 'pupil premium champion'; a teacher who has the responsibility for tracking the progress that these pupils are making, and ensuring that they are given the support they need. This has been successful, and current evidence is showing that differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils, including those disadvantaged pupils who are most-able, and other pupils are rapidly diminishing.
- Following the school's involvement in a writing project, standards have risen sharply for pupils of different abilities, including those pupils in key stage 2 who have average starting points. A scrutiny of pupils' books shows high-quality writing for a range of purposes and in different subjects.
- The progress that pupils are making, and the standards that they are achieving in mathematics, as seen in pupils' work, are rapidly improving. Following extensive support from other schools, teachers have developed very good teaching strategies. This has resulted in all groups of pupils making accelerated progress in mathematics across the school. Just occasionally, some pupils are not moved on to more-challenging work in lessons when they are ready.
- The noticeable improvement in the quality of teaching has had a significant impact on current pupils' outcomes. Standards in all subjects have risen sharply because leaders have successfully addressed the quality of provision that resulted in the previous low outcomes. This is apparent in both key stage 1 and key

stage 2. However, leaders are fully aware that the drive for improving outcomes needs to continue, especially for pupils working at a greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a higher proportion of pupils attain a greater depth of skill and understanding in reading, writing and mathematics by end of key stage 1
- during mathematics lessons, pupils are moved on to more-demanding work as soon as they are ready.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Chaffey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the head of school, the early years leader, subject leaders for English and mathematics and the teacher responsible for disadvantaged pupils. I also met with seven members of the governing body and a local authority representative. I spoke with pupils informally during lunchtime and when listening to pupils read. I made short visits to every classroom with your head of school and looked at pupils' books. I scrutinised various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding documents and documents detailing your monitoring of teaching and learning. I considered the six responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey, the 17 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 42 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View.