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Mrs E Seagrove
Headteacher
St Joseph's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mrs Seagrove

Short inspection of St Joseph's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 October 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The strong commitment and dedication you display for the pupils in your school and the wider community you serve are commendable. You are passionate in your determination to provide the very best learning experiences for all your pupils. This enables them to become well-rounded individuals who are equipped with the skills they need for the next stage of their education. Together with your subject leaders, you have crafted your school curriculum to be reflective of your pupils' needs and interests and reflective of the proud industrial heritage of the local community.

You are meticulous in tackling any identified weakness in performance and have addressed the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection successfully. The improvements you have made to the mathematics curriculum are borne out by the pupils' strong achievements, particularly at key stage 1, and those seen in provisional outcomes at key stage 2 in 2017. You have embedded strong practice which weaves the three elements of mathematical fluency, problem-solving and reasoning equitably through the curriculum. You use your extensive school grounds to enrich your provision. Pupils talked excitedly about 'wellie week', where each term pupils learn outdoors, developing their geographical and scientific fieldwork skills, capturing and recording data and analysing the seasonal changes they observe.

You and your governors have given attention to improving teaching. You are extremely supportive of your staff and have invested heavily in a comprehensive programme of training to improve their skills and support their development. At the same time you don't shy away from addressing underperformance and holding staff to account for their pupils' achievement. Staff rise to the challenges you give and strive to accomplish the aspirational targets you set for pupils' outcomes each year. You have nurtured a strong and cohesive team, who are fully aware of the priorities for improvement and who share your determination to be the best they can be.

One of your main priorities since the last inspection was to strengthen the role of subject leadership, which you have done successfully. Subject leaders have strong subject knowledge, are fully involved in analysing pupils' assessment information and play a full part in checking the effectiveness of their leadership and the school's improvement.

Your relationship with your local authority adviser is particularly effective in supporting your accurate and honest evaluation of the school's successes and weaknesses. Improvement plans reflect the key priorities for further improvement. They are detailed and they link precisely to the gains in pupils' achievement you aspire to.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent and contributes to the calm and orderly atmosphere in school. Pupils in all year groups demonstrate excellent attitudes to their learning and exemplary manners. When asked how leaders could improve their school, one pupil replied, 'It's perfect as it is! We all just get on.' Pupils talk eloquently about those of other faiths and beliefs and demonstrate tolerant and respectful attitudes to others. The strong Catholic ethos provides the bedrock of your work on supporting pupils' personal development. Pupils have a real sense of purpose and charitable giving. They are keen to support those less fortunate than themselves or those who are experiencing difficult times. For example, older pupils organised a fundraising day in school in aid of cancer research after the disease had touched their lives.

Since the last inspection, your determination to bring nursery provision to St Joseph's has been rewarded. The purpose-built Nursery opened in September 2015 and has been pivotal to the year-on-year improvements in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception.

As a result of your guidance, the strong profile of achievement continues into key stage 1, where pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are above the national averages. Your internal assessment information for pupils currently in the school indicates that strong achievement also continues into key stage 2. However, you were rightly disappointed with the dip in pupils' outcomes in reading and mathematics noted in the 2016 key stage 2 national tests. You reflected honestly on the reasons for this and made some organisational changes. As a result, provisional outcomes in 2017 show a marked improvement in pupils' achievement in mathematics, at both the expected and high standards, which are now in line with

your expectations. Disappointingly, the gains in pupils' achievement in reading were not as strong. Together with your deputy headteacher, you have already produced a detailed action plan and implemented several changes to the teaching of reading across key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Recruitment checks are detailed and follow local authority guidance to ensure that people who are employed to work with children are fit to do so. All staff have access to a comprehensive training programme to ensure that they are fully aware of their responsibilities in keeping children safe.

Pupils are well supported emotionally and socially to ensure that they have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Older pupils are particularly aware of the importance of keeping themselves safe on the internet and can talk confidently about 'e-safety'. The strong and trusting relationships that exist in the school give pupils great confidence that should an incident occur, there would be a trusted adult in whom they can confide.

You take prompt action in referring any safeguarding concerns to appropriate agencies and have developed strong partnerships with these agencies to secure any necessary support swiftly.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to find out the actions leaders had taken to improve the quality of teaching, particularly in reading at key stage 2. Your detailed analysis of pupils' outcomes has informed several adaptations to teaching across the key stage. A much greater focus on whole-class teaching of reading is helping pupils to develop their higher-order reading skills of inference and deduction. Pupils in danger of falling behind receive additional catch-up sessions. You are also working closely with parents to strengthen support from home. Parents particularly welcome your recently introduced open mornings, where they can spend time with their child's class teacher then join their child in class. You also give greater direction to the questions parents should ask when listening to their child read at home. It is too early to measure fully the impact of these changes, but early indications suggest that pupils are increasingly confident to use evidence from the text to answer challenging questions from their teacher.
- Another focus for the inspection was to explore the reasons for the large variance between pupils' achievement in reading and writing noted in key stage 2 outcomes in 2016 and to a lesser extent in 2017. You use quality texts to engage pupils into identifying the grammatical features and stylistic requirements of particularly types of writing successfully. Pupils then practise these features before attempting to write independently. This is securing good outcomes in writing. Occasionally, teachers are not consistent in following your policy and the required approach, particularly when studying non-fictional styles of writing; when this happens, pupils' progress slows.

- As it is a new addition to the school, I wanted to gauge the impact the Nursery provision has on children's achievement on entry into Reception class. The early years leader is a highly skilled practitioner, who has a strong pedagogical understanding of the developmental needs of young children. Children thrive in this well-organised and exceptionally well-run unit. Such is the strength of practice that although my visit was at the start of the academic year, the children were already demonstrating excellent listening skills and were following instructions, turn-taking and making choices about their learning.
- Staff in the Nursery use assessment information exceptionally well to ensure that activities are planned so that children can make rapid progress in their learning from their starting points. Adults are highly skilled in following children's interests to extend learning. For example, one of the children wanted to make a boat to help the gingerbread man cross the river. Adults followed this idea and it led to an extended activity using water to develop the earliest understanding of floating and sinking. Such is the quality of teaching and learning that the overwhelming majority of children make excellent progress and are ready to start in the Reception class with skills typically demonstrated at that age.
- There are very few disadvantaged pupils in the school. In 2017, their provisional outcomes at the end of key stage 2 were below those of their peers and below the provisional national benchmarking information. I wanted to find out how well additional funding was contributing to the progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school. Leaders, including governors, are well aware of the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils, and there is a detailed strategy in place which outlines the actions you and other leaders are taking to diminish any differences between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.
- A senior leader is responsible for checking the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and organising additional support. All teachers must maintain a 'class passport', in which they monitor disadvantaged pupils' progress each half term. This ensures that all staff are focused more keenly on these pupils in their class. Generally, there are too few disadvantaged pupils to make any comparison with national trends meaningful. However, from their starting points, disadvantaged pupils make the same good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as their peers.
- My final focus for the inspection was to look at how effectively leaders manage pupils' behaviour, particularly in relation to bullying. I found that you provide a range of effective strategies to support pupils' understanding of what constitutes bullying. You use several agencies to support your work and also to support your most vulnerable pupils' needs. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is excellent, and in speaking to pupils both formally and informally they express a mature attitudes towards bullying. As one pupil stated, 'it doesn't really happen and if it did it would be sorted. It's more that sometimes some children are a bit bossy!'
- Playtimes are extremely well organised. Year 6 playground leaders plan and organise playtime activities so there is always something for pupils to do. All pupils are on hand to look after new starters and to make sure everyone, who wants to be, is included in their games. Your highly effective approach to

managing behaviour means that you have very few incidents of poor behaviour to deal with. The documentation relating to incidents reflects the caring and sensitive manner in which they are handled. Occasionally, your records are not as robust as they need to be and do not accurately reflect the timeliness of your actions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to strengthen pupils' outcomes in reading at key stage 2 through the strong focus on developing pupils' higher-order reading skills
- approaches to the teaching of writing are consistently applied, particularly in relation to non-fictional styles
- records relating to behaviour management reflect the timeliness of actions taken.

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 South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the impact of the actions you are taking to continue to improve the school and to discuss safeguarding arrangements. We observed learning together in key stage 2 and in the early years and we talked to pupils about their learning. I also held meetings with the chair and vice-chair of governors, and with the local authority's school improvement adviser. I talked to pupils in classes, at playtime and around school and listened to four pupils read. I reviewed the provisional summer 2017 results in national assessment tests of pupils in the early years, Year 1, the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. I also checked the assessment information of all other year groups, and groups of pupils for the last academic year. Account was taken of the three responses to the staff survey and the 40 responses to Ofsted's parent and carer questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the results of your own parental questionnaire. A number of documents were scrutinised. These included a range of safeguarding documents, the school's written evaluation of its work and the school improvement plan. I also reviewed your recent headteacher's reports to governors and minutes from recent full governing body meetings and sub-committee meetings.