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Miss Pamela Crabtree
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Dear Miss Crabtree

Short inspection of St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

As the number of pupils on roll has fallen considerably, you have needed to manage the school's finances carefully. You have restructured the staffing and reorganised classes. Although you now have only two classes, which both cover a wide spread of ages and abilities, your skilled teachers have ensured that the curriculum remains broad, balanced and invigorating. Creative and engaging topics in key stage 1 and key stage 2 cleverly interweave all national curriculum subjects. Thorough planning ensures that teachers make sure that the learning within each topic is pitched appropriately for pupils of different ages. As a result, the 34 pupils currently in the school enjoy the topics they study and make good progress.

At key stage 2, topics such as 'Peasants, Princes and Pestilence' capture pupils' imagination. Teaching develops pupils' skills of research and investigation, and clever questioning during lessons keeps pupils thinking about rich vocabulary and effective use of grammar in their writing. Pupils respond maturely and confidently during discussions and express their ideas clearly, giving reasons for their views. At key stage 1, the quality of planning and preparation means that topics such as 'Paws, Claws and Whiskers' lead to a broad range of scientific, artistic and written outcomes of good quality. Teaching areas are richly resourced and very stimulating. Classroom walls are covered with exciting displays that teachers use to support pupils with the current topic or celebrate pupils' past achievements. In the key

stage 1 area, a wide range of resources is readily available to encourage pupils' curiosity and creativity.

Following the last inspection, you were asked to increase the proportion of teaching that was outstanding. In our visits to lessons we noted how your capable teachers continually kept pupils thinking and sustained high expectations. They were attentive to the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and skilled in challenging the most able pupils. When I looked at pupils' books, I noted how effectively a most able pupil was challenged in mathematics last year. The teacher regularly set complex mathematical problems that tested the pupil's ability to apply his skills. In addition, extra mathematics lessons at the local secondary school further developed the pupil's knowledge and understanding. It was no surprise that the pupil attained the higher standard in the 2017 national curriculum mathematics test. This reflects the detailed knowledge your teachers hold of each pupil in their class and their determination to provide a good-quality education for every child in their care. My checks on pupils' books from last year did, however, identify that the depth of learning in the wider curriculum at key stage 2 had been weaker than in core subjects. In some subjects, such as science and history, pupils' experience was patchy and topics had not been explored in much depth. Your key stage 2 teacher has begun to address this, and a recent science project on materials and their properties has been covered far more effectively this year.

Safeguarding is effective.

You make sure that all members of staff are well trained and know what steps to take if they have a concern about a child's welfare or safety. You and the chair of governors review safeguarding arrangements annually and ensure that all governors are well aware of the school's work to keep pupils safe.

Although you have rarely needed to act to protect a child, you ensure that your staff stay vigilant. You also help pupils understand potential risks to their safety. Your curriculum promotes positive values and informs pupils about how to stay safe online. You use external agencies such as the police and charities to give important messages. Your pupils also have the opportunity to undertake first-aid training, and to learn to swim and how to cycle safely.

Parents are confident that their children are well cared for and pupils themselves told me that they feel very safe at school.

Inspection findings

- As headteacher, you have fostered a positive culture in the school. Your staff work hard and are very adaptable. They have had good professional development opportunities and fully understand the expectations of the national curriculum. You, the governors and the diocese are of course concerned that numbers on roll have fallen. You are exploring every option to increase numbers and hope that the introduction of private nursery provision on the school site

may lead to more children progressing into the school.

- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress. Younger pupils develop a good grasp of phonics and use their skills in blending sounds to quickly develop fluency in reading. The pupils I listened to read, who were at different stages in their development, demonstrated a good level of understanding and enjoyment from their books. Pupils' writing skills develop well. Carefully chosen topics engage boys as well as girls and most write enthusiastically, bringing their work to life with colourful vocabulary. In my visits to lessons, I noted pupils routinely using dictionaries to check the meaning of words and debating with one another whether they were using new words appropriately.
- Progress in mathematics is equally good. From last autumn, the teaching of mathematics improved because teachers began to give pupils more problems to tackle. Their books effectively capture how pupils develop the know-how and resilience to solve problems. Pupils present their mathematical work well and routinely go back to make corrections or attempt new challenges set by the teacher.
- Your teachers have an excellent grasp of the national curriculum and a deep understanding of how pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills should progress as they mature. As a result, their planning cleverly integrates different subjects and tailors the level of challenge to meet pupils' needs. They use a range of ongoing assessments and carefully selected tests to determine each pupil's level of attainment. These assessments show that most pupils in the school are working at or above age-related expectations.
- The governors provide you with strong support. They are very active in school and manage to combine their strategic responsibilities with a more voluntary role as additional adults in classrooms. They have worked effectively with you to manage a restructure of staffing in order to maintain a balanced budget. They know how well the school is performing through your termly reports and their frequent visits to check on the quality of provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the depth of learning across the wider curriculum in key stage 2 is improved, so that pupils develop a good grasp of subject-specific skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Middlesbrough and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector
Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, your teachers and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I also met some parents and a group of pupils from key stage 2. I listened to some younger pupils read. Together, you and I visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I also looked in detail at some pupils' work from last year and this year, in order to evaluate the progress they had made over time. I walked around the school to look at pupils' behaviour and conduct at social times. I looked at the 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the two responses to the staff survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies and other information available on the school website. I concentrated particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school, the breadth and balance of the curriculum and whether pupils were being challenged sufficiently. I also looked closely at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.