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24 November 2017

Mrs Paula Cornell  
Headteacher  
English Martyrs' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Cornell

### **Short inspection of English Martyrs' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 September 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils have remained at the heart of your school's work throughout times of significant change, including your predecessor's retirement and the disbanding of the school's federation with St John Bosco Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School.

Leaders evaluate the school's strengths and areas for further development accurately and regularly. You have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning throughout your school. Leaders coach and mentor teachers effectively to improve their practice further. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is of a high standard throughout the school. This was an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection.

Since taking up your posts, you and your deputy headteacher have worked well to improve the progress pupils make in mathematics. This, too, was an area for development at the time of the last inspection. You understand that most pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics and, quite correctly, have identified the need for more pupils to reach the very highest standards.

Your pupils enjoy learning. They told me that they appreciate taking part in the various educational visits organised for them. They are polite, considerate and courteous. Parents and carers feel welcome in school. They enjoy attending celebration assemblies, workshops and meetings to discuss their children's progress. As one parent said, 'I send

my daughter to school knowing that she is happy, respected and safe.' Pupils behave well in school. Staff record and address the small number of incidents of poor behaviour appropriately. Governors have not challenged trends in pupils' behaviour over time because the number and types of incidents are not reported to them formally.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, as designated safeguarding leader, work diligently to ensure that pupils are safe in school and are educated to keep themselves safe outside of school well. For example, your older pupils learned about water safety and life-saving skills during a 'Hit the Surf' session at the end of the summer term. Your pupils have a deep knowledge of how to keep themselves safe when working online. Pupils in Year 2 told me that their teachers have taught them not to give out any personal information when using the internet.

Pupils understand the nature of bullying. They know it is repeated, unkind and hurtful. They told me that incidents of bullying are rare in school. Pupils trust the adults in school to deal appropriately with any incidents of bullying that may occur.

Leaders are working hard to improve pupils' attendance further and have had some success. The proportion of pupils who attend school every day has improved year on year over time. However, this proportion remains just below the national average. You have identified pupils' attendance as an area for continued development.

You work proactively with a host of external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils access the support they are entitled to receive. You keep records of meetings attended, and actions taken to support pupils, meticulously.

Leaders carry out all of the checks required to recruit new staff before they take up their posts thoroughly. Systems and procedures to check on the administration of the school's record of these recruitment checks require further development. Leaders' checks are not sufficiently robust.

### **Inspection findings**

- Teachers and teaching assistants are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school's work. Teachers in all key stages have strong subject knowledge. They also have high expectations of the pupils who attend English Martyrs'. For example, all teachers expect pupils to provide the reasons for their answers to questions posed. Teachers and teaching assistants organise the classrooms well so pupils know where to find the resources they need to complete tasks independently. Relationships in school are very strong. Pupils want to please their teachers. They try hard in lessons.
- Children make good progress during their time in the early years. The number of children who reach a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class is increasing year on year. The proportion has improved from 45% and well below the national average in 2014, to 73% and above the national average in 2017. Disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress overall too. The new early years leader has a firm understanding of the strengths and areas for development of each cohort of

children in the early years. She ensures that adults teach the children the skills they require to make progress in their learning. For example, the children's pencil grip and control improved following the implementation of a carefully designed programme to improve the dexterity of their fingers.

- Leaders analyse pupils' assessment information incisively every half term. They discuss the standards reached and the progress made by individual pupils with class teachers. Leaders identify any pupils who are at risk of falling behind quickly. Additional support is then put in place to enable them to catch up with their peers. As a result, pupils make good and occasionally exceptional progress in reading, writing and mathematics across key stages 1 and 2 over time. This is true of all pupils, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Leaders took immediate action to address the blip in the progress pupils made in reading at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. Teachers and teaching assistants are now teaching reading comprehension more often, using different resources. Leaders' initial evaluation of the new initiative is that it is bearing fruit. The pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are making better progress in reading, since the beginning of the current academic year, than they did over the same period last year.
- Leaders, quite correctly, have identified the need to increase the proportion of pupils who achieve greater depth or the higher standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in English and mathematics. This work is ongoing. Teachers are beginning to plan activities that enable the most able pupils to use their skills and knowledge to investigate open-ended problems deeply. Subject leaders do not check on the progress made by the most able pupils often enough.
- Pupils' attendance, although rising year on year, has not reached the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is too high. Leaders, quite properly, have identified this is an important priority in their plans to improve the school further. Leaders, including governors, acknowledge that the pupils who attend every day are the ones that make the most progress. Those who do not are in danger of being left behind.
- Governors do not ask for any information about the number and type of behavioural incidents in school. Consequently, they are unable to challenge any trends in pupils' behaviour over time. Senior leaders do not check the administration of the school's central record of recruitment checks effectively.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders check on the progress made by the most able pupils more often
- pupils' attendance improves further
- systems and procedures to analyse improvements in pupils' behaviour and to check on the accuracy of the school's record of recruitment checks are robust.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher, the early years leader, subject leaders and three governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I checked a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I examined information about pupils' achievement together with external evaluations of aspects of the school's work and minutes of meetings of the governing body. In addition, I held discussions with representatives of Sunderland local authority and the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. I considered the 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and four free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Alongside you, I visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment. I checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks and took note of one response by a pupil to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I talked formally to a group of six pupils and talked more informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktime about their learning.