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Mrs Felicity Penny
Headteacher
Ss Peter and Paul's Catholic Primary Academy
Northumbrian Road
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Dear Mrs Penny

Short inspection of Ss Peter and Paul's Catholic Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2011.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You have a very clear vision for the school and are dedicated to achieving the very best outcomes for the pupils of St Peter's and St Paul's. Since the last inspection, you have managed carefully and sensitively the reorganisation of your school from a first and middle school to a primary school. At the same time, you have steered the school through academy conversion and moved on to one site. This was particularly complicated as the school building required extensive refurbishment. This is the first full academic year where pupils and staff are settled in one building. It is testimony to your calm and positive leadership that all staff are upbeat and are proud members of the school team.

Together with the deputy headteacher, you have secured accurate assessment which enables you to identify priorities for improvement and allocate resources where they are most needed, accurately and effectively. Your subsequent action plans identify some of the actions you will take and how they will be monitored. However, your plans are not sharply linked to the gains in pupils' achievement you desire. As a result, you are unable to evaluate the impact of your work effectively.

Pupils say they are happy in school and this is endorsed by parents and carers. The strong Catholic ethos that underpins your work is ensuring that pupils are nurtured in their faith to be understanding, respectful and tolerant of others. This is

particularly so for the growing number of pupils who have recently arrived into the country, who are welcomed with kindness and affection from all. You have embedded a culture of high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Consequently, pupils are polite and well-mannered. They confidently say 'good morning' and eagerly hold doors open for adults and their peers. Pupils are positive about their learning, and strong and supportive relationships are securely embedded and evident as soon as you enter the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective. Staff understand their responsibilities in keeping children safe and follow the school's policy to report any concerns. They access regular training to ensure that they are up to date with the government's most recent legislation. Rigorous checks are made on staff employed by the school to ensure that they are fit to work with children.

You are vigilant when reporting any concerns. The trusting relationships you have nurtured between home and school ensure that you handle any concerns in a timely and sensitive manner. You use your links with other agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils receive appropriate and effective support.

Pupils who spoke to the inspector were knowledgeable in their understanding of how to stay safe, particularly when using the internet. They expressed growing maturity in their understanding of how to keep healthy and the importance of exercise to keep fit. They expressed great confidence that bullying does not happen at St Peter's and St Paul's and that if it did, any adult would sort it out straight away.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors review aspects of safeguarding as part of their regular checks on the work of the school.

Inspection findings

- You have rightly prioritised improving pupils' attendance this year. In recent years, pupils' absence, particularly of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, has been higher than the national average. Leaders emphasise the importance of coming to school and have put in place a raft of procedures to monitor pupils' attendance more closely. This is now paying dividends and considerably fewer pupils than was previously the case are frequently absent. Although moving in the right direction, attendance figures are still not in line with the most recent national averages.
- Leaders recognise that across the school the proportion of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, achieving at the higher standard has been variable, particularly in writing. Leaders have reviewed the quality of teaching and acknowledge that a consistent approach to the teaching of writing is required. However, while the subject leader has researched outstanding providers and formed a clear vision about what is expected, this has not yet been introduced.

As a result, there is limited evidence in the books reviewed of pupils working consistently at the higher standard.

- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics, particularly at the higher standard, are also variable and were below the national averages at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2017. Leaders use assessment information to organise interventions to plug gaps in pupils' learning and accelerate progress. This is having some success, especially in securing pupils' fluency in mathematical operations. However, work seen in pupils' books showed limited evidence of pupils being challenged to think hard about their learning, to reason and to apply their skills to problem-solving activities consistently.
- Senior leaders of the multi-academy trust recognise the need to increase leadership capacity in the school. They have reorganised subject leadership responsibilities among staff and are nurturing and supporting the development of new subject leaders' skills. However, this is in its earliest stages and not yet impacting positively on improving pupils' outcomes.
- Pupils' outcomes in the phonics screening check taken at the end of Year 1 have declined over the last three years. Leaders acknowledge that pupils being taught on two sites made monitoring the quality of teaching and learning difficult. A lack of focused leadership compounded the issues. All that has changed, as pupils are now taught on one site. You have appointed a phonics leader this school year, who has provided guidance for staff on how to structure phonics sessions. She has also secured accurate assessment information. While there are early signs of improvement in pupils' outcomes, there is still more to do to thoroughly embed approaches to the teaching of phonics and to ensure that staff consistently encourage pupils to apply their phonics skills outside of the discrete sessions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils attend more regularly, particularly those who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils
- more pupils are able to secure strong phonics skills by the end of Year 1, to support their reading and writing
- more pupils achieve at the higher standard, particularly disadvantaged pupils, in writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2
- they continue to strengthen the role of subject leaders in the school
- subject leaders' action plans are more precisely linked to the specific gains in pupils' achievement, so they can be more sharply evaluated by leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust and the deputy headteacher to discuss the impact of the actions you are taking to continue to improve the school and to discuss safeguarding. We observed learning together in the early years and key stages 1 and 2. While in lessons, we looked at pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning. I also looked at some pupils' books from this academic year. I held meetings with two representatives of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with the local authority's school improvement officer. I talked to a group of key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils and heard them read. I took account of 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, alongside your own survey from the autumn term. I scrutinised a number of documents, including a range of safeguarding documents, the school's written evaluation of its work and the school improvement plan. I also reviewed minutes from recent governing body meetings.