

21 February 2018

Mrs Lysa Grieve  
Headteacher  
Blue Coat CofE (Aided) Junior School  
Langley Road  
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Durham  
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Dear Mrs Grieve

### **Short inspection of Blue Coat CofE (Aided) Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 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.

The previous headteacher left the school in summer 2017. Governors are determined to appoint a strong successor to secure long-term improvement. While parents have understandable concerns over the current lack of a permanent appointment, governors have put secure transitional arrangements in place. Experienced headteachers from successful schools are providing stability during a period of change. Governors have brokered support that is providing continuity from acting headteachers while promoting existing staff at the school to take on new responsibilities. These actions have ensured that the school's improvement journey has not stalled. Indeed, new leaders have a clear picture of strengths and areas for improvement and are now actively working on strategies to accelerate the pace of school improvement.

Leaders have addressed areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Standards of writing have improved across the school, with pupils achieving levels of attainment above those seen nationally. Pupils typically punctuate their work effectively and are more confident writing at length. Leaders have also taken actions to improve the quality of teaching and are continuing to refine the assessment system.

The acting headteacher has developed the roles of existing leaders at the school. The deputy headteacher now has heightened leadership responsibilities and a new

acting deputy headteacher has been appointed to provide further leadership capacity. Middle leaders are leading a range of initiatives to raise attainment further and to increase pupils' rates of progress. The subject leaders for English and mathematics are participating in programmes to enhance their subject expertise and their wider leadership skills. Leaders have introduced more rigorous systems to check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Although middle leaders are more involved in checking standards and providing support, these changes remain at an early stage and are not fully developed.

Leaders and teachers have responded with increasing purpose to the heightened challenge of the new national curriculum. The proportions of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 were well above those seen nationally. The proportions achieving higher levels of attainment were also higher than those seen nationally, although to a lesser degree in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils also achieved levels of attainment above those seen nationally. Current pupils are typically making good progress, although progress in mathematics is not as strong as in reading and writing.

School leaders and governors have worked closely with local authority partners and educational leaders from the diocese to provide ongoing support and development during this transitional time. These partners have been instrumental in commissioning the support of two acting headteachers for the duration of the academic year and in ensuring continuity between these colleagues. The local authority has continued to review aspects of the school's work through its school improvement partner and specific review to check standards in areas such as special educational needs. Additional partnerships have supported teachers in developing consistent standards of assessment.

Governors are committed to the long-term success of the school while remaining keenly aware of their responsibilities to the current pupils. They are working to recruit a new headteacher while carrying out considerable partnership work to both maintain stability and sustain improvement at a time of change. They have the expertise to hold leaders to account for important aspects of school performance, including the use of additional funding. They demonstrate a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

### **Safeguarding is effective**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. School leaders and members of the governing body check the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures through regular audits of practice. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues. Concerns over pupils' welfare are pursued, although on occasions records do not fully reflect the actions leaders have taken.

The vast majority of pupils feel safe in school, and their parents agree. Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare and that staff are highly effective in addressing any

potential instances of bullying. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example to stay safe online, and how to avoid the potential threats posed by strangers.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have developed a positive ethos where pupils have a clear awareness of core school values. They demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and show respectful attitudes towards one another and adults. These are reinforced at the regular family teams meetings where pupils from different years cooperate positively with one another.
- Pupils feel safe and supported in school. They enjoy much of their learning and this is reflected in their high rates of attendance. Pupils value their education and the atmosphere cultivated by teachers.
- Many pupils display confident attitudes to learning. They are willing to share their thoughts and ideas in class and work with one another to solve problems. Pupils in Year 6 provided an enthusiastic and insightful account of their recent art project, describing the organic qualities of Henry Moore's sculpture and how this had influenced their own sculptures.
- Leaders have introduced new strategies to improve teaching in mathematics. These contributed to the improving attainment and progress for all pupils and disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 in 2017. The new leader for mathematics is intensifying this process by ensuring a stronger emphasis on reasoning and problem-solving. New strategies are being introduced to accelerate the progress of girls but at present they are not consistently implemented. In lessons, pupils were able to explain their arithmetic methods intelligently, although in some cases the most able pupils were not moved on rapidly enough in their learning.
- Leaders are developing new forms of assessment and additional support to further improve pupils' progress in writing, particularly for boys. In 2017, girls achieved standards that were well above those seen nationally. While boys' attainment was above the national average, their progress was not as strong. Additional work with teaching assistants and a renewed focus on key skills is leading to improving progress across year groups.
- Leaders have developed tiered systems to provide differing levels of support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Parents and carers have opportunities to review the effect of this support at regular review meetings. Pupils share their views on the effect of support with teaching assistants. Leaders have developed good transitional links with infant and secondary schools to improve the continuity of support. These actions are contributing to good progress for a number of pupils, although some inconsistencies remain.
- Leaders and teachers promote an enthusiasm for reading that contributes to high standards of attainment and improving progress for pupils. Pupils engage purposefully with class novels and have numerous opportunities to read more widely. Reading diaries encourage parental support for reading while a reading programme tracks and evaluates pupils' reading.

- The teaching team provides pupils with an extensive range of extra-curricular clubs, trips and activities that widen their experience and develop pupils' self-confidence. Pupils access a wide range of sporting activities. A high proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, take part in these activities.
- While there are strengths in the wider curriculum, pupils do not develop subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding in science in sufficient depth, and this hampers their progress is less developed.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in mathematics, particularly that of girls, is further accelerated through the consistent implementation of new initiatives
- teachers provide consistent challenge across year groups to build on the increasing proportions of pupils reaching a greater depth of understanding
- further develop the emerging roles of middle leaders to strengthen their effectiveness in monitoring progress, leading improvement and sharing good practice
- leaders and teachers provide opportunities for pupils to make stronger progress and acquire greater knowledge, skills and understanding in science.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

As part of the inspection, I explored the actions taken by leaders to accelerate pupils' progress, with a particular focus on mathematics. I also looked at how leaders used pupil premium funding and at the support provided for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. I explored whether high rates of attendance for pupils were sustained.

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders. I also spoke to six members of the governing body, including the chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I also talked to the school improvement partners from the local authority. I held a telephone conversation with the director of education for the diocese. I looked at learning in lessons with senior leaders. I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined the school

improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, behaviour and attendance information and pupil tracking. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 68 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, 47 free-text responses and eight responses to the staff questionnaire.