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Mr John Hattam
Headteacher
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Prince Consort Road
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Dear Mr Hattam

Short inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have provided strong, dedicated and insightful leadership, which has driven the continuous development of the school. Along with your leaders and governors, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plan clearly identifies the priorities and actions for improving the school further. You, your staff and governors are ambitious to ensure that your pupils' personal development flourishes and their academic progress thrives.

Leaders, staff and governors have largely tackled the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have also maintained the previously identified strengths. For example, your school's work with artists and prestigious arts organisations has enriched your curriculum. This is providing pupils with a wide range of opportunities for active and independent learning and helps them develop their language acquisition and widen their cultural horizons.

During our visits to lessons, pupils engaged well with their learning and worked hard. This is because your teachers plan work that matches pupils' needs and interests well. Your pupils could confidently explain to me their learning and explain what they were aiming to improve. Your teachers work hard to ensure that pupils receive feedback, in line with the school's policy, that supports pupils' continuous improvement. Your pupils told me that one of the best things about your school is that staff, including yourself, make learning fun.

You and your leaders have created a pupil premium strategy that takes into account the needs of disadvantaged pupils and relevant barriers to their learning. The actions in this plan link effectively to addressing these pupils' personal development and academic needs. However, leaders could sharpen the strategy by introducing measures of success that relate directly to improving disadvantaged pupils' progress and attainment. This will enable leaders, including governors, to check the effect of this additional funding on improving disadvantaged pupils' academic outcomes.

The provision for pupils' personal development and welfare is a key strength of the school. Your curriculum, caring ethos and opportunities for responsibilities all help develop pupils' citizenship skills. Pupils have many opportunities to develop personal responsibilities and contribute to the local community. For example, your pupils were keen to tell me about the work of the school council, playground buddies and 'Mini Vinnies'. Links to community initiatives such as Joe's Place help pupils understand the needs of others who live within the community that your school serves. The school's levels of pupils' attendance are consistently above the averages found nationally. This is because your pupils enjoy and value school and your staff work hard to support pupils and families where attendance levels need to improve. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary in lessons, around school and at breaktimes. Written responses to the Ofsted free-text survey for parents and carers, Parent View, were highly positive. Many commented about your school's caring environment where their children's confidence grows, and staff who work hard to help pupils to make good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. It is evident that you, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They carry out appropriate checks for all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe, including training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Consequently, staff and governors understand the safeguarding procedures and their own responsibilities. You and your staff work effectively with parents and other agencies. You have a resolute approach to ensure additional support for your pupils if they have specific needs. Your assistant headteacher, the vulnerable pupils advocate, works hard to ensure that provision for pupils who require additional support helps them to thrive and succeed.

Your pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. This is because they receive regular teaching and presentations about safety. Pupils know the different forms that bullying can take and know that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. Pupils believe that behaviour at your school is very good and that incidents of bullying are rare. You and your staff make effective use of systems to monitor behaviour and bullying. Parents agree that their children feel safe in your school and that staff ensure that children are well behaved.

Inspection findings

- From starting in Reception, the vast majority of children make at least good progress and they are well prepared for starting Year 1. Pupils continue to make good progress across key stage 1 and key stage 2. Their progress in writing and mathematics is particularly strong.
- Over the past three years, your pupils' phonics outcomes have improved. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was above the national average. However, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading by the end of Year 2 is below the national average. Similarly, in key stage 2, pupils' progress in reading, while broadly in line with the national average, is not as strong as pupils' progress in writing and mathematics. Consequently, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading by the end of Year 6 is below the national average.
- You and your subject leader for English have rightly identified the need to improve pupils' progress in reading further. Recently, you have put in place a wide range of strategies to improve the teaching of reading, particularly to enhance pupils' vocabulary development and reading comprehension skills. You have also raised the profile of reading through learning displays and rewards such as 'reader of the week'. During our visits to classrooms, we observed some of these approaches in action. This shows that teachers are responding well to recent training and new resources. Leaders, including governors, agree that these approaches require embedding and that senior and middle leaders need to check on the impact of these developments on the quality of the teaching of reading and pupils' reading outcomes.
- The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics and particularly reading, lag behind those of other pupils in school and nationally. Leaders, including governors, identify this as a high priority. You have rightly identified actions to accelerate disadvantaged pupils' progress in reading within the school's pupil premium strategy. However, some refinements to the measures of success are required and leaders need a more focused eye on the strategy's effect on disadvantaged pupils' academic outcomes.
- The deputy headteacher, who is the subject leader for mathematics, provides a high level of expertise and has a good understanding of the priorities for development in this subject. Actions taken to secure pupils' knowledge of basic skills enable pupils to have number facts, such as multiplication knowledge, at their fingertips. Regular homework and practice of mathematical skills help pupils to embed their learning securely. Ambitious to develop pupils' progress in mathematics further, your deputy headteacher has clear plans to improve the teaching of reasoning and problem solving.
- Governors have a good understanding of the community the school serves and the school's priorities for improvement. Regular visits into school help governors to see the effect of actions to improve pupils' personal development and learning. Recent presentations from a wider range of leaders are beginning to provide opportunities for governors to understand the effect of school developments,

such as the arts initiative. The safeguarding governor's involvement with auditing provision and reporting to governors ensures that safeguarding remains high on the agenda for governors.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recently introduced strategies to improve pupils' progress in reading are embedded, and that senior and middle leaders check carefully for improvements in pupils' outcomes so that the school's reading results by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 at least match the averages found nationally
- the school's pupil premium strategy is refined to include measures of success directly linked to disadvantaged pupils' academic outcomes and that leaders, including governors, use these measures to check on the effect of the strategy.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and your assistant headteacher. I also held a meeting with the leader for English and early years. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I had telephone conversations with a representative from the local authority and the deputy director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, who were able to provide me with additional information. I took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school's website. I considered the 68 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. Along with you, I visited five classes to observe teaching and learning. I listened to pupils read both within lessons and individually. I looked at pupils' work in English and mathematics help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I considered information relating to safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and bullying.