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Mrs Joanna Bircham
Headteacher
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Highfield
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Dear Mrs Bircham

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

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, you and your leadership team have successfully maintained the quality of education in the school. Issues with staff absence, for example, have not held you back from ensuring that your school continues to improve. Working alongside governors and the local authority, you effectively evaluate the strengths and areas for development in the school and implement appropriate action plans to improve. The impact of these actions is clear in the way you have tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve pupils' knowledge of how to be successful in lessons. Through a pupil-centred approach to generating success criteria, pupils are more involved in their learning and are able to talk about what they know and what they are doing well. You were also asked to improve writing progress across key stage 2. Pupils now make progress in line with their peers nationally and pupils' work shows that grammatical skills, handwriting and presentation are improving. You continue to use pupils' strong reading skills to improve their writing.

Pupils enjoy being at school and this shows in their excellent attendance, which is well above the national average. They appreciate the variety of activities that are on offer to help them learn. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils used technology to support their learning, for example listening to the teacher's pre-recorded explanations to help them to become more independent in securing extra help. In

key stage 1, pupils chose their own resources to assist their learning in mathematics and were able to explain the choices they made.

Staff are happy in your school. You have an effective system for managing staff performance, which links to the whole-school development plan. This ensures that staff take responsibility for developing their own teaching while working to achieve the school's improvement priorities. You work with the local authority, other schools within the local area and the diocese, to ensure that assessments of pupils' knowledge and skills in mathematics and English are accurate and of high quality. We agreed that further developing the systems to assess pupils' skills and knowledge in the wider curriculum subjects in this way is now an important next step.

You recognise that mathematics results in the last academic year were not where you wanted them to be. Consequently, this academic year, you are focusing on improving the quality of mathematics teaching across the whole school. Following an audit of your mathematics provision, you are making changes to ensure teaching improves. For example, ensuring a consistent approach across the school is helping pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge in reasoning and problem-solving tasks. Pupils' workbooks show that there are frequent opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of mathematics. We agreed, however, that to strengthen mathematics further, teachers should develop opportunities across the wider curriculum for pupils to practise mathematics in order to consolidate and embed their skills in a variety of contexts.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils feel safe and are safe in your school. Pupils said that bullying is very rare but if it does happen, they have absolute confidence that staff will help them and resolve any issues. Parents said that their children are well looked after while they are at school. You have a thorough approach to safeguarding and you train staff well. When you need to take action to support pupils, you do so quickly and you persevere with external agencies so that pupils get the support they need and deserve.

You ensure that records about safeguarding are well ordered and thorough. Where you have a concern, you always check to make sure that actions happen to help pupils. Where pupils' attendance falls, you take action, including alerting the local authority to those who could be missing, and you make further checks to satisfy yourself that they are safe.

Inspection findings

- You accept that pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics dipped in the last academic year at both the end of key stages 1 and 2. Pupils did not make as much good progress as their peers nationally from similar starting points. Leaders across the school have reflected on this and identified the reasons why. Action plans to ensure a consistent approach to teaching mathematics are now in place

and current pupils are making better progress. You agree that providing more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills across the wider curriculum is an important next step for school improvement.

- Careful tracking of pupils' progress ensures that teachers quickly identify pupils who fall behind. Appropriate intervention is put into place in English and mathematics so that pupils stay on track. Teachers and leaders check pupils' progress from the beginning of the academic year and from pupils' previous starting points. They ensure that those who need to make rapid progress do so. Leaders agree that implementing this approach across the various curriculum subjects would help pupils to achieve more in the wider curriculum.
- Leaders' spending of additional funds for the small number of disadvantaged pupils ensures that they receive support to overcome any identified barriers to learning. For example, leaders recognised that some disadvantaged pupils' vocabulary is not as broad as their peers and needs widening. As a result, you invested in resources to do this. Teaching assistants receive effective training to ensure that programmes of support for disadvantaged pupils are delivered to a high standard. This helps pupils to catch up. Some disadvantaged pupils receive music tuition to develop their skills further.
- Over time, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the early years has been improving and is now in line with the national average. Children in Reception are now taught alongside pupils in Year 1, who are good role models. Children involve themselves in a variety of activities and can sustain their concentration. They enjoy planning the activities that they will complete throughout the week and are proud of their work.
- Leaders and teachers ensure that children in the early years are provided with many opportunities to develop their reading and writing skills and their independence. Accurate assessments of what children know and can do; along with careful tracking of their progress ensures that children receive the support and challenge they need to do well. As a result, children make good progress from their starting points. However, in line with the rest of the school, opportunities to develop children's number skills are sometimes overlooked.
- Leaders ensure that by working with other schools in the diocese and local community, assessments of what pupils can do are accurate. Leaders agree that further work is needed to ensure the same high standards and levels of accuracy across the wider curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders and teachers build on the improvements in mathematics by developing opportunities across the wider curriculum for pupils to practise their mathematics skills
- assessments systems in the wider curriculum develop further so that they are in line with the quality of assessments in mathematics and English.

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

Debbie Redshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and your senior leaders. I also met with members of the governing body including the vice-chair, and I held a telephone conversation with your local authority school improvement partner. I visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I spoke with pupils during their lessons and at breaktime. I reviewed pupils' work in a range of subjects in a sample of their workbooks. I reviewed information detailing pupils' progress and attainment, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking on the performance of teachers. Documents relating to your work to safeguard pupils, including records of behaviour and safeguarding incidents, were also checked. I reviewed the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 67 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 10 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Thirty-three pupils' responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire were considered.