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Mrs Nerissa Nicholas  
Headteacher  
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Cumbria  
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Dear Mrs Nicholas

### **Short inspection of St James' Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 January 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

St James' distinctiveness as a faith school is a golden thread running through every aspect of school life. You encourage your pupils to live by the Christian values which underpin your school's vision. St James' is a warm, welcoming community school where parents are valued partners in their children's education.

Pupils love coming to school. They wear their uniforms with pride, take care with their work and listen attentively to their teachers. Pupils treat each other, staff and visitors with respect. They are always keen to lend a hand. As one parent told the inspector, 'The school's family atmosphere is its greatest strength, and when pupils join the local secondary school in Year 7, they are instantly recognisable as St James' pupils, through their beautiful manners, confidence and existing knowledge.'

Your youngest children settle quickly into school life. The Reception Year is a hive of activity as children set about their tasks. You make sure these children are well-equipped for the demands of key stage 1. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6, the overwhelming majority have reached the academic standards expected, in readiness for secondary school.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers and support staff value the wealth of training and support they access in school, as part of the local cluster or further afield. You do not allow the school's

isolated geographical location to be a barrier to your team's professional development. Staff are growing in confidence, proficiency and experience. In school, staff are confident to seek the advice and guidance of their peers. For example, the experienced subject leader for mathematics helps her colleagues with lesson planning, assessing pupils' work and teaching new concepts. This is helping to embed your new approach to teaching mathematics successfully across the school. Moreover, you encourage staff to attend specialist courses further afield where necessary, for example early years mathematics training. These actions are helping you to improve achievement in mathematics for your youngest pupils. This was the second area for improvement at your previous inspection.

You provide teachers with constructive feedback following lesson observations and work scrutinies. Teachers are in no doubt about what is working well in their classrooms and where improvements should be made. You make sure that teachers at the start of their careers are well supported during those early days.

Pupils and staff are relishing the school's new approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils enjoy the tricky challenges and engaging investigations teachers set them in mathematics. Pupils are adept at finding new words and phrases to make their writing more interesting now. Pupils pay heed to their teachers' advice and make good use of the available time to make corrections and improve their work. Consequently, current pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.

Governors are highly supportive of the school. They have a range of experience and expertise. Governors found the recent discussions with mathematics and English subject leaders, about areas of the school's improvement plan these staff are leading on, very useful. Governors plan to invite other staff to report directly to them about their work to further improve governors' challenge and support to the school. Governors, staff and pupils find the annual governor days a valuable experience. Governors get to know the school first hand. They visit classrooms, talk to pupils and meet staff.

However, governors recognise that there is more to do if they are to be as effective as they would like to be. They have already carried out some key actions to help. For example, the governing body is seeking the support of a national leader of governance to provide them with coaching and mentoring support. In addition, the clerk has improved the quality of the minutes of meetings so that these records are more useful for members. Moreover, the governing body is insisting that all members must commit to attending meetings as a matter of course. Although it is early days, these actions are making a positive difference to the governing body's ability to provide effective strategic leadership.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders carry out thorough pre-employment checks to reassure themselves that staff are suitable to work with children. All staff have up-to-date training to make sure they

fulfil their roles and responsibilities diligently. Record-keeping is meticulous. Leaders follow up assiduously on any concerns. Pupils trust the adults who look after them and are confident to share any worries or concerns they may have. They are taught about possible risks and how to keep themselves safe. Pupils are adamant that any very rare incidents of bullying would be dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. Parents and pupils agree that pupils are well cared for and safe.

## **Inspection findings**

- You have taken effective action to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. You employed an attendance officer with the relevant experience and expertise to help you make the necessary improvements. You revised your attendance policy and established robust procedures to follow up on any absence. Moreover, you support those parents who struggle to get their children to school. Every class is keen to win the weekly attendance award and pupils are proud of their 100% attendance certificates. As a result, rates of absence and persistent absence have reduced dramatically this academic year. However, you are quite rightly concerned about the impact of term-time holidays on the learning of a small but significant number of your pupils.
- Following the implementation of the new national curriculum in 2014, staff designed a new curriculum for St James'. Subject leaders have carried out lesson observations, checked pupils' work and provided support to their colleagues to make sure that foundation subjects are taught well. These leaders make sure they keep up to date with any developments in their subjects. They develop their expertise through local network meetings as well as attending training further afield. Recently, staff have recognised the need to revisit the school's curriculum design. They are keen to ensure that pupils acquire the essential knowledge and skills to stand them in good stead for high school and beyond. Subject leaders are eager to embed reliable assessments for all the foundation subjects so that they can reassure themselves about how well pupils are progressing. This will help these leaders to prioritise their support as well as providing senior leaders with a comprehensive overview of pupils' academic performance. Pupils relish the richness of the curriculum. They value and learn from the wealth of trips and visitors the school organises. For example, the past comes to life for pupils when they build a Viking long ship, visit a local archaeological excavation and learn a Tudor dance.
- You were concerned that pupils were not capitalising on their good start in Reception as they moved into key stage 1. You put in place high-quality training and support for key stage 1 staff. You have kept a close eye on the quality of teaching, scrutinised pupils' work and checked pupils' performance data. The class teacher now moves up with their class from Reception to Year 1 so that not a moment is wasted at the start of key stage 1. As a result, current pupils in key stage 1 are making faster progress. Moreover, a significant minority of these pupils are exceeding the standards expected for their age.
- The school makes sure that staff get to know pupils and their families well. Staff identify any barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils and put in place bespoke plans. For example, one member of staff has invited selected pupils to join a volcano club. Pupils in this club take part in fun activities which help to raise their

self-esteem and build their confidence. Furthermore, staff plan trips and visitors to broaden pupils' experiences. Pupils put the knowledge and skills they acquire to good use in the classroom, across different aspects of the school's curriculum. In addition, support staff put short-term interventions in place to help pupils who are struggling with an aspect of their learning. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils across the school make at least expected progress. However, governors have not ensured that the school has published a pupil premium strategy on its website which includes all the information required.

- The local authority and your colleagues in the local cluster hold your experience and expertise in supporting pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities in high regard. You seek out specialist advice and support to help you meet the diverse needs of pupils at your school. Your specialist support staff undergo a wealth of training to make sure they have the expertise to do their jobs well. You are working in partnership with a specialist adviser to enhance your provision for the increasing number of pupils who have autism spectrum disorders. Consequently, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities achieve well.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors implement actions so that they make a more significant contribution to school improvement
- the school continues with its development of the design, implementation and review of its curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

- The inspector met with senior leaders, teaching and support staff, the chair and two members of the governing body. The inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector considered the 20 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as taking into account the results of the school's most recent survey.
- The inspector met formally with a group of staff and considered the 19 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff.
- The inspector talked informally to pupils throughout the school day as well as meeting formally with a group of pupils.
- The inspector visited classrooms and checked on pupils' work, both in books and on wall displays.
- The inspector looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation and action plan, and a range of other documentation.
- The inspector conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training, recruitment checks and record-keeping.