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Mr Dominic Curran  
Headteacher  
St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School  
Hampshire Place  
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Dear Mr Curran

### **Short inspection of St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 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. You demonstrate a passionate and dedicated commitment to the school, the pupils and their families, and the community that the school serves. You lead by example with a strong moral purpose. You, your staff and governors are determined to do the best for every pupil in the school. You provide a nurturing environment rooted in the school's distinctive Catholic ethos. This enables pupils to get off to a strong start in their education when they begin at the school.

Your deputy headteacher supports you effectively. Together you have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You have worked swiftly with other leaders, including governors, and school staff to address those areas that need improving the most. At the time of the previous inspection you were asked to improve pupils' phonics skills, and since then standards in this area have markedly improved. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and well-planned sessions lead to effective phonics teaching. This enhances pupils' early reading and writing development, and as a result, pupils make strong gains in their phonics knowledge.

St Bede's is a vibrant, caring and happy school community, where each child can grow in mind, body and spirit. Pupils are well prepared to contribute to their school and local community. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are kind, considerate and courteous. They show pride in their school. Staff support pupils well. Pupils are encouraged to be responsible, supportive and independent in their words and in

their actions. Pupils are respectful at all times. When in lessons, they work well together and show high levels of engagement in their learning. This positively contributes to the vast majority of pupils achieving well over time.

Governors are well informed and have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors provide support to you, and they use their skills and expertise to challenge you and other leaders so that the school continues to improve. They, like you, are committed passionately and with dedication to improve the school even further.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policy and practice go hand in hand. There is a culture of vigilance in the school. Leaders and governors are well aware of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe and they do this, for example, by ensuring that checks on staff, volunteers and visitors who work in the school are thorough.

Staff are well trained and kept informed so that they fully understand their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. Records kept by the school relating to safeguarding are detailed. They demonstrate that leaders do not hesitate to act if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare. Actions taken by staff are timely and effective. Links with external agencies are appropriate and followed up, where necessary.

Pupils feel safe, and they are well looked after and cared for. Pupils told me how they enjoy coming to school to be with their friends and learning new things. Those spoken with during the inspection had no concerns about bullying, and were confident that if they had a concern a member of staff would deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils engage in various activities to teach them about staying safe both inside and outside of school. For example, they learn how to stay safe when using the internet, and how to be safe when riding a bike and when going swimming. The vast majority of parents and carers, who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their child is safe and happy at school.

### **Inspection findings**

- An area that I examined during the inspection was around leaders' actions to improve pupils' writing skills by the end of key stage 2, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The 2017 results in writing show that overall a smaller proportion of pupils than nationally achieved the expected standard by the end of key stage 2 in their writing; this was particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders' actions to secure improvements in pupils' writing, particularly disadvantaged pupils, have been successful. As a result of concerted actions by leaders, current pupils' skills in writing show much improvement. Teachers plan purposeful opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their writing skills. The

evident high expectation of pupils' writing in their English books is now an evident expectation across other subjects. As a result, pupils are increasingly producing work at the same standard in other subjects as they do in English. Recently, strategies to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar have been successful. Consequently, work in current pupils' books shows that they are benefiting from completing written work of a high quality, leading to them achieving much better over time in their writing. Nevertheless, despite recent improvements, leaders acknowledge that the school's assessment system has not been effective in the past, because expectations in writing have not been clear enough. Although leaders are currently addressing this area, it is not improving as swiftly as they anticipated.

- An area that leaders have identified as an ongoing priority is ensuring that all pupils are sufficiently challenged in their learning. Over time, those pupils working at a greater depth of understanding has been inconsistent. Current information about pupils' learning, supported by checking pupils' workbooks supports the view that current pupils are making better gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding so that a higher proportion can achieve at a greater depth. However, leaders acknowledge that current assessment practices have hindered staff from using pupil information effectively so that work is consistently and suitably challenging for those capable of working at greater depth. Again, leaders are currently working hard to address this.
- During the inspection, I also visited the early years provision in school. Over the past two years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been above the national averages. It is evident that effective planning and use of resources, complemented by high-quality teaching, ensures that children thrive in the early years because of the range of opportunities they have to explore and learn. During the visit I could see that children benefit from opportunities to engage in their learning, both inside and outside. Children were enthused by the activities they were engaging in and because of this were confidently developing their speaking, listening and physical development skills.
- Leaders and staff have placed the well-being of pupils at the heart of their work. Pupils' social and emotional welfare and their mental health needs are at the forefront of all leaders' and staff's work at the school. Strong relationships with parents and external agencies benefit pupils, and allow purposeful and productive conversations and interventions to take place so that pupils' needs are well cared for. The school's pastoral and well-being leader is pivotal in ensuring that pupils are well cared for. She is meticulous in her work and the actions she takes are appropriate, timely and have a positive effect on developing pupils' confidence and resilience.
- Leaders track and monitor pupils' attendance thoroughly. Information recorded about pupils is detailed. Actions in place to support pupils to attend regularly are effective because they take a measured approach and, in some instances, are bespoke to individual pupils. As a result, some pupils' attendance has shown clear signs of improvement. Although attendance overall remains below the national average, leaders have a range of strategies in place so that it continues to improve.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- existing plans to evaluate and refine current assessment practices continue, so that age-related expectations are clearer for all staff, and as a result, challenge is sufficient for all pupils across each phase, particularly those capable of working at greater depth
- the strong focus on improving attendance continues so attendance is at least in line with national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and other leaders, including governors, to evaluate the strengths and areas for development across the school. We also discussed improvements since the previous inspection. Together, with you and your deputy headteacher, I visited all classes in each phase of the school. I reviewed work in pupils' books, particularly concentrating on writing, and I discussed with you current pupils' assessment information. I spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, about their learning and experiences of school. I listened to a group of pupils read. I read and scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the school self-evaluation document, the school's development plan, attendance information and documents relating to behaviour, safeguarding and child protection.

I also took into account the 13 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 57 responses to Parent View. No pupils completed the pupil survey.