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Mrs Alison Miller
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Dear Mrs Miller

Short inspection of St Mark's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection, you have worked with determination and skill to ensure that pupils achieve and develop the personal knowledge and skills they need to prepare them very well for their futures, in a safe and caring environment. You model the school's values in your interactions with staff and pupils. Staff are motivated by this. They are committed to doing their best for their pupils. As a result, pupils love coming to school.

You have ensured that, through your well-considered personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) education programme, pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their skills. As a result, they become self-confident learners and self-assured members of the community. They learn to reflect on their learning and how they can keep improving it. Pupils are curious to learn and this contributes effectively to the progress they make. They are caring and respectful of others who come from different backgrounds from their own.

Together with the wider curriculum, the PHSE programme prepares pupils exceptionally well for their next steps in education. Pupils demonstrate increasingly high levels of achievement and extremely positive attitudes to learning.

You have set about ensuring that all pupils can capitalise on the opportunities offered to them through the curriculum. They value the wide range of extra-curricular activities, which include both breakfast and after-school clubs, as well as a variety of sporting opportunities.

You have put in place training that enables teachers to understand pupils' learning needs very well, and to use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting and engaging lessons. This has motivated pupils very well. As a result, pupils produce good-quality work over time, across a wide range of subjects and especially in English and mathematics.

You ensure that classroom support staff are well equipped to support pupils' learning needs. You make sure that their training needs are met. As a result, they can play a full part in lessons to carry out planned activities with individuals and small groups of pupils.

You recognise, however, that sometimes staff miss opportunities to plan challenge in learning in some foundation subjects with the same degree of precision as in English and mathematics. You have already begun working with your leadership team to strengthen this aspect of the school's curriculum and teaching.

You have worked with governors to improve the quality of outside provision for children in the early years. Adults now provide children with a wide range of stimulating activities to support their development. This has enabled staff to help children make better progress in their language and communication skills and physical development.

You have improved the quality of teaching and learning by developing the skills of middle leaders. They now play a full part in the school's monitoring and evaluation processes. You have made sure that they have well-focused opportunities for professional development. Consequently, they are able to share effective practice with colleagues. For example, your focus this year on improving the range and richness of pupils' vocabulary, alongside their skills in spelling, grammar and punctuation, has helped pupils make significantly better progress.

You have built on the previous successes in mathematics, so that pupils make very strong progress throughout key stages 1 and 2. You have already begun to explore more, new ways for pupils to apply their learning through other subjects. This is especially so in science and the work to update the curriculum, as plans are finalised for the beginning of the next academic year.

You have used the analysis and evaluation of information about pupils' progress at the end of key stages and during the year carefully. You use your evaluations to work with governors and other leaders, to identify accurately the areas that need

the greatest focus for further improvement. Sharp and accurate evaluation leads to well-focused priorities for further development. This enables middle leaders to tailor their work with staff to improve their practice. It also enables governors to hold leaders fully to account, challenging and supporting them in equal measure.

Your work with middle leaders is characterised by a deep desire to ensure that the curriculum and teaching continue to improve to become excellent in all respects. The current areas of focus in science and humanities for next year build effectively on the very successful work this year to develop pupils' language and mathematical skills. You have enriched pupils' vocabulary and improved their accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation. By doing so, you have established a high-quality basis for excellence in learning across the wider range of subjects

You have focused work with families to improve attendance significantly this year and to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. By achieving both of these, you have secured better learning opportunities for all pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have worked with pupils, staff and governors to ensure that the arrangements to safeguard pupils are fit for purpose and used effectively. You ensure that safe recruitment protocols are adhered to, thus ensuring that only suitable adults work with pupils. Pre-employment checks are made on all staff and care is taken to check the suitability of volunteers who work with staff and pupils. You make sure that records of checks are diligently kept, including for governors, on a single central register.

Staff are trained well to recognise the signs of abuse and neglect. They use their excellent knowledge of their pupils to keep a sharp eye out for any concerns that might arise. Arrangements to report any concerns are straightforward and effective. This enables you, as the designated safeguarding lead, to put in place early help where it is needed and work effectively with a range of teams and agencies to help keep pupils safe.

You also ensure that your staff support pupils effectively in two key ways. First, you enable staff to develop exceptionally strong and positive relationships with pupils. As a result, pupils trust staff, and know they can turn to them and be listened to if they have any concerns or worries. This helps keep them well emotionally. Second, you ensure that the PHSE programme supports pupils' learning about how to keep themselves safe. With additional learning provided through external providers such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), pupils develop their understanding of the risks associated with the use of the internet and social networking sites. They know about the dangers of misuse of drugs and alcohol. Pupils learn from the earliest ages to move around the school safely, taking care of each other. The school site is safe and secure. Pupils say that they feel safe in school at all times and work together to make sure that everyone is happy.

Inspection findings

- I considered, with you, how well the school is sustaining and extending the improvements in pupils' academic achievement across the school. Your development work with middle leaders is paying dividends. They play a full part in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, they are able to use their specialist subject training to develop the curriculum and sharpen the teaching skills of their colleagues. As a result, very high proportions of pupils make good progress, and, increasingly large proportions of pupils make very good progress in both key stages 1 and 2.
- Your work with the early years team, in developing the use of the outside learning area, has successfully enabled staff to focus on improving children's language and communication skills and their motor skills. As a result, children make very good progress from starting points, in these areas of development, that are often well below those typical for their age. Accurate assessment is helping staff target activities to develop strengths in these areas. Consequently, the school has built successfully on the strong upward trend, above the national average, of pupils who achieve a good level of development. However, you recognise that yet more can be done to develop staff skills to help pupils learn, very effectively, when they choose their own activities.
- Your highly effective work to enable pupils to make particularly strong progress in mathematics has been sustained. Skilled, well-planned teaching supports pupils' mathematical fluency very well. Pupils develop, very well, their reasoning and problem-solving skills. You recognise that there are further exciting opportunities to extend the use of such skills, as you introduce your renewed curriculum, for example in science in the next school year.
- You have worked to great effect with staff on improving the quality of pupils' writing during the course of this year. In the early years, staff pay good attention to providing opportunities to children to engage in early mark making and writing. This is supplemented by very effective phonics teaching, which prepares pupils well to develop their reading and writing skills, as they move through key stages 1 and 2.
- The whole-school focus on developing accurate use of grammar and spelling is complemented by your success in broadening and enriching pupils' vocabulary. As a result, achievement in reading and writing in key stages 1 and 2 is improving rapidly. Boys' achievement continues to improve. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. However, you recognise that the difference between their achievement and that of others in the school has diminished but has not yet fully closed.
- Pupils make good progress overall in their wider subjects. Some work is of a very high quality. You know, however, that it is not yet consistently of the same high standard that is being achieved in English and mathematics. You have targeted further improvement across the range of subjects by using the clear strengths evidenced in English and mathematics. You recognise that sometimes the challenge for learning is not sufficient to enable as high a proportion of pupils to achieve a higher standard across the broader range of subjects. You are dealing

with this challenge, as you introduce your renewed curriculum in the next school year.

- Your work to improve attendance and reduce the number of pupils who regularly do not attend often enough has proven very successful this year. Attendance is currently in line with the national average and there remains only a small number of pupils that do not yet attend regularly enough. You are conscious that this area remains a focus of the school's work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff build on the successes of this year, by further improving pupils' language and mathematical skills to diminish the difference in achievement between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and others in the school
- they pursue the successful introduction of the school's renewed curriculum so that well-focused challenge underpins learning that enables a larger proportion of pupils to achieve the highest standards across a wider range of subjects
- staff continue to work with pupils and families to further improve attendance.

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 Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Campbell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, governors, and a group of pupils. I held informal discussions with pupils, staff, parents and carers at various points during the day. I met with the school improvement partner. I gathered a range of evidence by conducting observations of teaching and learning and scrutinising pupils' work. A wide range of documents was evaluated, including those relating to the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils, and the school's self-evaluation and planning documents. I considered the school's records of pupils' progress and information about their attendance. I scrutinised a range of documents about the work of leaders, including minutes from governors' meetings. I considered the views of parents expressed in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I took into account the responses of staff to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. No pupils responded to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.