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5 September 2018

Mr Michael Cooney and Mrs Jane Dolphin  
Co-headteachers  
St Bega's RC Primary School  
Thorpe Street  
Hartlepool  
TS24 0DX

Dear Mr Cooney and Mrs Dolphin

### **No formal designation inspection of St Bega's RC Primary School**

Following my visit with Ofsted Inspector Gillian Nimer to your school on 17 July 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about outcomes for pupils at the school.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements, and met with the co-headteachers, groups of pupils, a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also spoke to the local authority school improvement partner on the telephone. In addition, inspectors spoke to other senior leaders and a group of teachers. Inspectors visited lessons to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, inspectors scrutinised some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. Inspectors also scrutinised, in detail, a selection of pupils' English and mathematics books from key stage 2. Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, pupil premium strategy, assessment information, monitoring records and minutes from governing body meetings. Inspectors also looked at the 34 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

## **Context**

St Bega's RC Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school, with 187 pupils on roll. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is more than twice that seen nationally and has increased markedly since the previous inspection. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. The school adopted a co-headteacher leadership model two years ago, as part of its succession planning arrangements. Since the last inspection in June 2015, the school roll has increased. Since then, around 30 pupils have transferred to the school across both key stages and several joined late in key stage 2.

## **Safeguarding**

Leaders ensure that pupils are safe and that there is a strong culture of vigilance. Safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and are well understood by the staff. Appropriate vetting checks are made on all adults who work in or visit the school. All members of staff respond quickly if they have any concerns about a pupil's safety or well-being. The school's curriculum helps pupils to understand risk, including when they are online. Leaders work closely with the families of vulnerable pupils and ensure that they work in partnership with other agencies when wider involvement is needed. Members of staff carefully consider potential risks when they take pupils out of school on trips and take the necessary steps to keep them safe.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

St Bega's RC Primary is a small school, with between 20 to 30 pupils in each year group. In some classes, the proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is high. A challenge for the school has been the increased mobility of pupils since the last inspection, with several pupils joining classes part way through the school year. These factors have led to fluctuations in outcomes since the school was judged to be outstanding in 2015. Last year, for example, outcomes at the end of key stage 2 were well below those seen nationally. Only 40% of pupils attained the expected standard at the combined reading, writing and mathematics measure. Pupils' progress in mathematics was a particular concern, as they made significantly less progress in the subject than seen nationally.

Provisional results from national curriculum tests this summer tell a different story. This year, provisional data shows three quarters of pupils have attained the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. As this group of pupils entered key stage 2 with broadly average starting points, this indicates their progress has been strong and sustained. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities also made strong progress across key stage 2. The work in

pupils' books from across the key stage shows most pupils are making swift gains in their knowledge and understanding. In English, pupils regularly draft, edit and improve their work in response to the sharply focused feedback they receive. In mathematics, teachers provide a well-balanced range of tasks to develop pupils' confidence with number and test their skills in solving problems. Inspectors found that pupils have good opportunities to learn about wider topics across the curriculum.

Outcomes for pupils have been less volatile at key stage 1 in recent years, with standards of attainment being broadly average. However, teacher assessments for this year reflect the changing nature of the school's pupils, with more working below the expected standards in reading and writing. Within the key stage, the proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is high. As a result, the school has additional teaching assistants providing good-quality support in lessons. Teachers are skilled in managing the transition from the early years to more formal schooling. Those pupils who still need time to learn through play have the opportunities and resources to support their development. Each year, around 40% of pupils enter key stage 1 with levels of attainment below those seen nationally. This is because many children enter the Nursery with skills well below those typical for their age. Although good teaching ensures that they make strong progress across the Nursery and Reception Years, some children's skills remain below those expected for their age.

Overall, children make strong progress from low starting points on entry to the school. Their needs are quickly assessed and staff work closely with a wide range of external specialists to support their development. For example, there are good programmes in place to support children who have limited speech and communication skills. By the end of key stage 1, most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have reached broadly average standards of attainment. Provisional results from national curriculum tests this year indicate that pupils currently in the school have attained standards above those seen nationally. As a result, they are well prepared to start secondary education.

There are some aspects of learning where further work is needed. Firstly, leaders have recognised the school's approach to the teaching of early reading and writing skills is not wholly successful. Although children respond well to the teaching of phonics in the early years, some pupils do not build on this and develop their skills effectively across Years 1 and 2. Outcomes in the Year 1 national phonics screening check have declined in recent years to be well below the national average. By the end of Year 2, the effective additional help provided for pupils means that most have caught up and can decode well the sounds that letters make. However, there are too many pupils who still struggle to read fluently and with confidence, which adversely affects their ability to understand fully the meaning of texts. Leaders have looked at the reasons for this and visited other schools to look at alternative teaching approaches. They have invested in a new reading and writing programme which will be rolled out next term. Secondly, the most able pupils in some classes

are not making as much progress as they should. Leaders know this because they track the progress of different groups of pupils carefully. Consequently, teachers have begun to provide more challenging work for the most able pupils, although it is not clear yet whether this is helping to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Lastly, inspectors found the quality of pupils' presentation and handwriting to be variable. While many pupils take great pride in their work, some take less care and this is not always challenged by teachers.

## **Leadership and management**

Leaders responded quickly following the disappointing results at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. They undertook a detailed analysis of why pupils had underachieved. In part, they concluded that the weaker outcomes were the result of turbulence caused by new pupils with significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding joining the class late in key stage 2. However, some changes have been made to the teaching of English and mathematics this year. For example, for some pupils, significantly more help has been provided by teachers through extra teaching sessions after school. These changes have tightened up the quality of teaching and ensured that any gaps in pupils' knowledge have been closed.

Senior leaders display a deeply inclusive commitment to meeting the needs of all pupils in the community. The school has a warm and welcoming atmosphere. All the parents and carers who responded to Parent View would recommend the school. One parent reflected the views of others when writing, 'St Bega's provides a wonderful learning environment and upholds a positive Catholic ethos.' Pupils, too, told inspectors the school is a welcoming place that makes them feel safe and secure. Pupils say there is no bullying and confidently reported behaviour to be excellent. One pupil said: 'We always look after new friends. It doesn't matter who comes here or what has happened in their life, we just take them in.'

Senior leaders know the school well and continue to trial new approaches to teaching so that pupils are fully engaged and helped to think deeply. However, leaders are not sufficiently systematic in checking the impact these new approaches have on pupils' learning and progress. The school's self-evaluation documents are underused and have fallen out of date. Similarly, school improvement plans are not ready for the start of the new school year in September, with little in place to allow the governors to hold leaders to account.

## **External support**

The local authority quickly noted the dip in pupils' outcomes in 2017 and visited the school to explore and understand the reasons for the decline. Since then, more challenge and support have been provided. Ongoing advice has been given to help subject leaders review the teaching of English and mathematics, and senior leaders were signposted to good practice in other schools. More recently, senior leaders have started to work on their improvement planning following challenge from the

local authority support partner. The increased scrutiny and support from the local authority have helped senior leaders to restore impressive outcomes for pupils this year.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Produce effective improvement plans that set out how areas of weaker performance will be addressed, with clear targets and timescales, so that governors can hold leaders to account.
- Ensure that pupils who need extra help in developing phonics and early reading skills get the support they need in key stage 1.
- Ensure that the work provided consistently challenges the most able pupils.
- Raise expectations and ensure that pupils maintain the highest of standards in their presentation and handwriting.

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 Hartlepool Borough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**