

19 October 2018

Mrs Anne Bullerwell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Bullerwell

### **Short inspection of St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 25 September 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 March 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 provide purposeful leadership. Your desire to help pupils be the very best they can be shines through in all you do. Without exception, pupils, parents, carers and staff agree that the school has gone from strength to strength under your leadership. You have created a harmonious team in which all staff appreciate your openness and attention to detail in relation to staff well-being. There is a strong emphasis on staff development in the school. Leaders, including governors, understand the need to constantly strive for improvement. They actively explore new opportunities within school and beyond to help staff acquire new skills or gain experience in unfamiliar roles.

A strong Christian ethos permeates the school. Relationships between pupils are strong and are typified by genuine mutual respect. Staff in the school know the pupils very well. They expertly develop pupils' academic skills and value equally the importance of nurturing pupils' curiosity and wider interests. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They listen attentively in class, are polite and well-mannered and most try their very best at all times. Pupils' understanding of what it means to be different is well developed. They embrace cultural diversity and, as one pupil explained to me, believe that 'we are all one big family anyway'.

The quality of teaching in the school is good. Typically, teachers are enthusiastic, demonstrate strong subject knowledge and use teaching assistants effectively. Teachers often provide pupils with a range of activities that are designed to build a

sense of anticipation and purpose. For example, in a Year 1 science lesson, the teacher provided pupils with several smelling pots so that pupils could attempt to identify the various smells. In Reception, the teacher acted out the role of 'pet shop Pete' to engage children in the activity. Consequently, children enthusiastically helped the shop owner write an organised list of animals to complete a stock take.

Teachers' questioning is a strength. In most lessons, teachers ask searching questions that require pupils to reflect on their understanding and feelings. Teachers encourage pupils to 'have a go'. Teachers respond by giving pupils praise and support, as required. Teaching assistants know their role well. They liaise effectively with teachers prior to each lesson so that they have a clear understanding of what they will be doing in advance.

Governors are experienced, knowledgeable and have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They ensure that they fulfil their statutory responsibilities and seek to satisfy themselves that the information they are presented with by leaders is accurate. Governors do this by conducting regular visits to the school and by asking staff to present at governing body meetings. Inspection evidence demonstrates that governors ask searching questions of you and your leaders and are not afraid to hold staff to account regarding any underperformance.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your staff are highly vigilant and ensure that you are aware of emerging risks that could pose a danger to young children. For example, teachers have helped pupils understand how to stay safe online, including appropriate ways to communicate with others on online gaming platforms. You seek advice and guidance when needed from safeguarding professionals and have developed effective relationships with outside agencies such as the school health team. You make appropriate checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils. You also ensure that all staff receive regular safeguarding training in addition to frequent updates in staff meetings or via email.

Pupils say they feel safe and are taught how to stay safe. They feel confident to share any concerns they may have with adults in the school. You are aware that pupils' concerns in relation to their own mental health and well-being can manifest themselves in many ways. Consequently, you have supported school initiatives, such as 'Zippy's friends' in Year 2, an initiative designed to help pupils share their emotions and feelings. One member of staff has recently been trained to support pupils who may have social, emotional and mental health issues. All staff have had training to help them identify and alleviate anxiety in pupils.

School systems to record and report safeguarding concerns about pupils are thorough and help all staff share information or respond to concerns in a timely manner. Furthermore, child protection records demonstrate that leaders are proactive and knowledgeable. They ensure that all pupils who need early help or

support receive it swiftly.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the last inspection, you were asked to increase the expectations for the most able pupils, especially at key stage 1, so that more attain the higher standards for their age. Inspection evidence, including published data and unvalidated attainment outcomes for 2018, highlights that the proportion of pupils who attain the expected standard at greater depth in key stage 1 is increasing. However, you acknowledge that there is more work to be done to ensure that the most able pupils in key stage 1 attain as highly as those at key stage 2.
- You were also asked to ensure that senior leaders provide a clearer, simpler overall picture of the progress all pupils and different groups of pupils make across the different key stages, so that this information is more effectively shared with staff, managers and the governing body. You have been successful in reviewing how pupils' assessment information is shared. Leaders, governors and staff have a clearer understanding of the pupils who are doing well and those who need further support. You have introduced systems that swiftly identify underachievement and allow teachers to plan suitable interventions. Consequently, when a pupil does not attain well or make the progress you expect, they receive additional advice or guidance. This is helping pupils to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills over time.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception is above average. Very few children leave the early years unable to communicate effectively or demonstrate a secure understanding of basic literacy and numeracy skills. You and the early years leader have noticed that, more recently, children's personal, social and emotional development when they enter Nursery or Reception is not as strong as in the past. You are supporting children in this regard by focusing more readily on this aspect of children's learning, for example by providing activities that build children's self-confidence and encourage them to work cooperatively.
- More children who speak English as an additional language join the school in the early years than previously was the case. Some arrive unable to speak any English at all. Staff are beginning to develop appropriate means of communication and are working closely with families to support their children, particularly in the first few weeks of school. The focus on early reading skills, especially phonics, is helping these pupils recognise letters and the sounds they represent. Nevertheless, some pupils find it difficult to access a full curriculum until their speaking and listening skills in English improve sufficiently.
- Effective teaching has contributed to Year 6 pupils attaining well and making above average progress in writing and mathematics. However, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in reading has declined over the past two years and is now in line with the national average. When pupils read, most are able to use their phonics skills to help them decode unfamiliar words. When asked, pupils can explain the meaning of some new words they encounter when reading. However, you acknowledge that pupils need to broaden their range of vocabulary to develop their reading skills further. To reverse this decline, leaders

have placed more emphasis on the teaching of vocabulary across the curriculum. Teachers across the school consistently introduce new, subject-specific vocabulary and encourage pupils to learn how to spell and use such words in their writing. For example, in a Year 5 class, pupils were learning how to write persuasively while studying the Anglo-Saxons. The teacher successfully encouraged pupils to define new words such as 'forged' or 'merchant' and to use them in a sentence. This approach is beginning to develop pupils' comprehension and give them the confidence to use more complex vocabulary in their everyday writing.

- Leaders, including governors, create and review plans to spend additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils in a timely manner. These include a wide range of appropriate strategies to support disadvantaged pupils that lead to these pupils making above average progress in writing and mathematics. While improving, progress is not as strong in reading. Governors have appointed a member of the governing body to have oversight of this aspect of the school's work and two members of staff are 'pupil premium champions'. In collaboration with the headteacher and governors, the pupil premium champions lead on the creation and implementation of strategies to improve pupils' outcomes. This ensures that the attainment and progress made by disadvantaged pupils remain a priority across the school.
- Pupils enjoy their learning, understand their locality and heritage, and become confident and resilient learners and are ready to make the transition to secondary school. The taught curriculum is supplemented well by a considerable number of visits, external speakers and guests, in addition to many projects and links with schools abroad. You ensure that pupils have a lively list of extra-curricular activities to choose from, including a wide range of sporting activities.
- The school teaches the foundation subjects as part of its 'creative curriculum'. Pupils are taught specific English and mathematics skills together with wider knowledge, skills and understanding within subjects such as geography and history. The well-planned curriculum enables pupils to appreciate the links between subjects and provides pupils with further opportunities to practise recently taught literacy and numeracy skills. The school science laboratory provides pupils with opportunities to investigate scientific concepts. Pupils attain well and make strong progress in science and foundation subjects, in both key stages 1 and 2.
- Although not a focus for me at the start of this inspection, we discussed pupils' attendance in detail. Historically, pupils' rates of attendance have been above the national averages and the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has been low. However, the attendance information you shared with me highlighted that the rate of attendance had fallen during the last academic year to be below average. The school's own information highlights that the number of parents taking family holidays during term time increased last year. Leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to promote good attendance and encourage parents to reflect on the timing of holidays.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they work closely with families to make sure that pupils' rates of absence are reduced
- teaching expertise is shared more widely to support a greater proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards, particularly in reading and key stage 1
- pupils who speak English as an additional language receive swift and timely support to allow them to communicate and access the curriculum.

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

Lee Elliott  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I accompanied senior and subject leaders during observations in classrooms and together we reviewed and evaluated pupils' written work. I listened to a group of pupils read and spoke to governors, teachers, pupils and parents. I analysed the school's website and evaluated a wide range of additional documentation. This included the record of suitability checks on staff, and safeguarding policies and associated files, in addition to attendance and behaviour logs. I reviewed assessment information about pupils' attainment and progress, as well as leaders' action plans and evaluations. I took into account the 41 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Twenty-four members of staff completed Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. Thirty-nine pupils responded to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. All these responses were taken into consideration.