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Mrs Louise Keenan  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Ushaw Moor  
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Dear Mrs Keenan

### **Short inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Ushaw Moor**

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 February 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 became headteacher of the school and of the partner school in the federation in September 2016, following a period where there were three different leaders in three years. You recognised the need to bring about stability and clarity of purpose. You have successfully established trust by building on the school's strengths and developing the federation, so that the partnership brings benefits to both schools.

Staff say that they are clear about what is expected of them and of pupils. For example, you have ensured that the full primary curriculum is delivered by making explicit what should be taught each day. You are equally clear about the high standard of teaching and the quality of learning that you expect. Integral to this aspiration is the continual support and encouragement that staff receive to develop their own skills and expertise. You have enabled this through the development of partnerships with other schools and with organisations locally and further afield. The assistance and training that staff in the early years received last year enabled them to organise the classroom more effectively so that there were increased opportunities for children to practise what they had been taught. This enabled a higher proportion of children to be ready for the demands of the Year 1 curriculum.

You recognise that the strong teamwork and mutual support among staff is a strength to build on so that the warm and happy family atmosphere is maintained. The vast majority of pupils who made their views known to me enjoy school and are keen to learn and do

their best. Staff provide good role models, demonstrating how they work together well. Relationships between staff and pupils are trusting and provide a strong platform for learning.

You and your deputy headteacher have a very effective working relationship. This is essential to maintaining the momentum of improvement when you are working in the partner school in the federation. You both share a clear-sighted understanding of what the school does well and what needs to be improved. You make regular checks on the quality of teaching, in particular, examining the work that pupils complete in their books. Regular, half-termly discussions with teachers ensure that any pupil in danger of falling behind is provided with appropriate support to help them keep up with their classmates. You make certain that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided with carefully tailored support to help them achieve well. You are also keen to seek the views of pupils and of their parents and carers, to gain a rounded picture of how the school is performing. You share parents' feedback and respond carefully to each suggestion. You do not shy away from responding, even when there is criticism of your leadership, seeing this as an opportunity to learn and reflect on what you do. As a result of your perceptive understanding, you have carefully targeted resources to bring about improvement. You and your team have successfully raised standards in reading, writing and mathematics in the early years and in key stage 1. Pupils' progress in reading and writing has accelerated in key stage 2.

You are determined to make the federation enrich both schools equally. Your sensitivity to the need to retain each school's unique features, while promoting the benefits of closer joint working, have been influential in bringing staff on board. Federation days have been initiated so that pupils in both schools meet each other and share their learning together. You are also keen to use the expertise within both small schools to improve the effectiveness of middle leadership. Staff are now sharing ideas and working together to bring about improvements in some subject areas, though this is still at an early stage of development. Plans to accelerate this process are in place now that previous staffing instability has been resolved.

The governing body shares your ambition for the school and for the federation. They have a good understanding of what works well and what needs to improve. Governors visit regularly, gaining an understanding of day-to-day practices and how these link to a more strategic overview. Careful recruitment has ensured that governors bring an appropriate range of skills and experience to offer a good level of challenge and support to you. Where governors have identified that their understanding needs to improve, they have attended training to address the need. Governors' evaluation of leaders' monitoring is regular but does not yet cover all aspects of the work. For instance, they have not satisfied themselves that leaders have checked to ensure that the school website meets requirements. They are aware that leaders' work to support pupils' understanding of diversity in modern Britain needs to improve, but there is no plan in place to satisfy themselves how well this is being implemented in future.

You have largely addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection, although you acknowledge that staff changes have meant that this has taken longer than you would have wished. Improvement plans are now clear to governors and

staff. There are explicit timescales and clarity about what success will look like. You have ensured that pupils are provided with more opportunities to write at length, particularly in key stage 2, where pupils have regular opportunities to use different types of writing in science, history and religious education, for example. Writing is well structured and expectations of how much pupils should write are consistent. Presentation and handwriting are generally strong in key stage 2.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff know pupils and their families very well. Any concerns are carefully and systematically documented. They are followed up diligently and persistently where it is necessary to do so. Staff training is up to date so that adults are clear about what to do if they have concerns about a child. Recruitment procedures include rigorous suitability checks. Governors maintain an overview to ensure that policies are up to date and pupils' safety is not compromised.

The youngest children are welcomed to school by their older buddy. This arrangement, which is a notable aspect of school life, is valued by staff and by pupils alike. It is an essential ingredient in helping children settle and for strong relationships among different age groups of pupils to develop. 'House time', which takes place daily, also enhances pupils' relationships, providing an opportunity to learn about mutual respect and tolerance of each other.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that if they had a concern they would tell a teacher. They say that behaviour is generally good and that bullying is rare. School records confirm this. A good range of opportunities enable pupils to learn about how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils are alert to the dangers of using the internet and what they must do to keep themselves safe. They know how to cross the road safely and understand the dangers of alcohol.

### **Inspection findings**

- Standards in mathematics were lower than those in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. This disappointment confirmed leaders' concerns and led to a thorough root and branch review of mathematics teaching across the school. Weaknesses were identified in pupils' confidence and ability to use and to apply their basic mathematical skills. Consequently, leaders have implemented a series of non-negotiables to enhance pupils' learning in mathematics.
- Throughout the school most teachers support pupils to grasp new mathematical learning well. They develop pupils' understanding by showing a number of practical examples and checking through questioning that pupils' mathematical understanding is enhanced. Simultaneously, staff also show pupils how they would record this new learning using correct mathematical symbols and language.
- A daily session devoted to learning mathematical facts has been introduced and there is a more systematic approach to the way that pupils are taught. In particular, pupils in key stage 2 have regular opportunities to think more deeply about mathematics, to solve problems and demonstrate their understanding. The group of older pupils I

talked to during the inspection had a good grasp of the mathematics they had been taught and said that teachers' clear explanations helped. They all said that they enjoyed mathematics lessons. However, school leaders are aware that the new approaches have not been implemented consistently. In some year groups, pupils still spend too long practising skills they have already mastered and are not asked to think deeply about the subject. Some pupils are not supported well enough to build their understanding and skills logically and progressively. Leaders are aware that more needs to be done to improve the teaching of mathematics and that the new developments need to be rigorously checked.

- Leaders have identified that pupils need better preparation to understand the diversity of life in modern Britain. This aspect of the curriculum is underdeveloped and therefore pupils' understanding is not secure. For example, although there are opportunities to learn about different faiths and pupils display an attitude of tolerance, their knowledge is scant. Similarly, despite leaders' work to provide appropriate resources which challenge gender stereotypes, pupils' knowledge and understanding are not well developed. Improvement plans are in place but do not cover all elements to develop pupils' secure understanding. Governors' evaluation of this aspect of leaders' work is infrequent.
- Progress in writing has been improving in key stage 2, with standards in grammar, punctuation and spelling skills being above average. This is reflected in pupils' current writing in key stage 2, where pupils demonstrate good spelling and use of punctuation.
- Standards of writing improved in 2018 in the early years and key stage 1, with the large majority of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age and a high proportion exceeding that standard. However, a work scrutiny I conducted with the headteacher indicated that these improvements are not fully embedded. Inconsistent teaching has resulted in inconsistent progress. Expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are not always high enough and pupils' writing skills are not taught systematically. For example, some pupils who wrote in simple sentences at the end of early years were still writing in a similar way at the beginning of Year 2. Standards of handwriting and presentation were also variable and pupils were given insufficient opportunity to apply the phonics skills they had been taught.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans to improve the teaching of mathematics are implemented consistently and rigorously across the school
- pupils gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the diversity of life in modern Britain, and that governors regularly evaluate the findings of leaders' monitoring of the effectiveness of this area of the curriculum
- higher standards in writing are maintained in the early years and key stage 1, by:
  - ensuring that the curriculum supports pupils to build up their writing skills in a logical way
  - having high expectations of pupils in the presentation, handwriting, quantity and

quality of their work

- providing frequent opportunities for pupils to apply their phonics skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Waugh  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I also met all teachers and teaching assistants. You and I visited lessons in most classes. I met with a group of six governors and spoke to two representatives from the local authority. I spoke to a group of pupils about their work in mathematics and a different group about their views of the school, including their views of pupils' behaviour. I listened to some pupils read their work and looked in their workbooks when in lessons. I also conducted a work scrutiny with you. There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, so I considered the school's own parental survey and spoke to groups of parents. I also looked at the school's own pupil survey and took into account the seven responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. A range of documents were considered, relating to safeguarding, attendance and governance. I examined the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. I also scrutinised pupils' recent achievements in national assessments and I looked at the school's website.