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Mrs Jane Apolloni  
Headteacher  
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Apolloni

### **Short inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have very successfully steered the school through turbulent times during the past twelve months. During this time, you have not lost sight of the absolute necessity to put your pupils at the heart of all you do. You have been very ably supported during this time by the governing body. Also, because of your approach and actions, staff remain in good heart and are well placed to take the school to the next stage of its development. Staff morale is high. The diocese and the local authority have supported you and the school effectively during this trying time. They continue to be strong partners.

You know your community well and respond to its needs. Your openness was commented on, very positively, by many of the parents and carers I spoke with. The strong relationships, which you and your staff have with parents, are a real strength of the school. For example, they have had a positive effect on improving overall attendance, which is now close to the national average. However, a small minority of pupils are still persistently absent. You are aware of this and it is an important priority for the school. You have put in place energetic, thoughtful and tenacious staff, supported by rigorous and efficient checking systems, to address and reduce persistent absence. You understand the challenges facing many of your families and parents. However, you are also clear and unwavering in ensuring that they understand that their children must attend school regularly if they are to learn and be safe. Because of the school's actions, although still too high, incidents of persistent absence are reducing steadily.

You and your team have responded very effectively to the recent weaknesses in outcomes in mathematics. Evidence from this inspection, and the school's own monitoring records, show that the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is improving rapidly. This is because, working with your mathematics and other middle leaders, you have introduced a new school-wide mathematics course that gives pupils a clearer sense of their progress and developing skills as mathematicians. This approach also gives staff, including teaching assistants, a range of ways to approach their teaching. The mathematics leader has been careful to follow up the introduction of the new course with detailed and regular monitoring. This has meant that you have been able to embed this whole-school approach to mathematics effectively, making minor changes to it to suit the needs of your pupils and the skills of your staff.

You have put in place a stimulating and interesting curriculum that is, increasingly, focusing on subjects beyond English, mathematics, science and religious education. You and the governors are very clear that a broad curriculum, rooted in subject-specific knowledge and skill, is essential to pupils' success, now and into their futures, as informed, contributing citizens. The curriculum is underpinned by a wide range of clubs and before- and after-school activities and sports. These help pupils develop a range of skills. You also ensure that pupils have a growing sense of their responsibilities through opportunities to be of service to others, both at school and in the wider local, national and international community. The curriculum also takes full account of, and provides opportunities for, pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, as well as the importance of developing healthy approaches to eating and care of their bodies. Pupils eat happily together at lunchtime in an attractive communal dining area. They told me that they enjoy this and the opportunities it gives them to meet and chat.

The inspection of the predecessor school in November 2013 identified the need to further improve the quality of teaching. You have worked effectively to address this. There is a school-wide assessment policy that is followed both by staff and by pupils. Pupils respond to staff comments in line with the school policy. Staff display good subject knowledge. They know their pupils well, especially those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Teachers use the information they gather about pupils' progress to plan work that stimulates and engages them. During the inspection, I saw examples of staff showing their expertise in the use of questioning to extend and deepen pupils' thinking. I also saw staff using questioning with a combination of persistence and kindness to develop pupils' understanding. The school, both in and out of the classroom, is an attractive and exciting place to learn. Pupils' work is celebrated in attractive displays. The walls also remind pupils of the variety of humankind and the world beyond the school.

Middle leaders are a strength of the school. Because of your actions to encourage leadership at every level, including among pupils and across the school, middle leaders are increasingly confident and well informed. They

monitor the quality of teaching through direct observation and team working with members of staff. Because, increasingly, they know staff well, they act promptly when issues emerge that require attention. They also lead whole-school training. Your support and encouragement for these staff members have enabled them to develop their skills. The links with the governors who have oversight of a particular subject or key stage brief provide another effective source of support and challenge for middle leaders.

The local governing body is very well led. It knows the school and the community it serves well. It is realistic about what needs to be done and is highly motivated. It has set in place rigorous checks of the school's performance that challenge and support the school. You regularly supply governors with detailed information about how the school and its pupils are doing. However, they do not rely on this alone to make their judgements about the school. Governors, including the chair of the governing body, visit the school regularly to talk with staff and pupils. In addition, there are increasingly fruitful links between nominated governors and middle leaders of subjects and areas at the school. These links give governors detailed insights into the challenges facing staff as they implement change and continued improvement. This means that the local governing body, working with and supported by the trust, is knowledgeable and able to take well-informed actions.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are regularly updated and are of high quality. Governors monitor the accuracy and quality of these records through regular checks and visits.

You have established a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. You, your staff and the governing body take your safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. You ensure that regular and effective training is provided for all staff and governors. As a result, they are all up to date in their knowledge and understanding of all aspects of safeguarding. You have very strong links with outside agencies. The records of your dealings with these agencies are very detailed and show that you act appropriately. You engage with the local authority promptly and follow up safeguarding issues tenaciously.

### **Inspection findings**

- A significant number of children, but by no means all, enter the early years with skills and experience below those normally expected for their age. Because of the very thorough and thoughtful work of the leader and her team, children quickly settle into school and enjoy an exciting environment that is full of interesting experiences. They make good progress through the Nursery and the Reception classes. This is because staff monitor their progress carefully. They identify aspects of children's learning and well-being that need extra attention and, through careful planning, provide experiences

to suit and enthrall them.

- Children in Reception are safe and well behaved and learn how to get on together. School community routines are quickly established and relationships among the children and between adults and children are kindly, open and generous-hearted. Reading is well taught. Across the past three years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development, including those who are disadvantaged, has been very close to the national average. Parents are encouraged to play a very active role in their children's learning. They appreciate and welcome this. Parents are very complimentary about the ways in which staff in the early years keep them informed about their children's progress and happiness.
- Phonics is effectively taught. I saw examples of the teacher and teaching assistants teaching phonics with confident assurance, developing children's skills and moving promptly to address misconceptions. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been similar to national average over the past three years. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 has been close to, but below, the national average across the past three years. Unvalidated outcomes for summer 2018 end of key stage 1 assessments in writing suggest that they will be well above the 2017 national average and that reading will be slightly below. However, results in mathematics are likely to be below the national averages.
- Middle leaders are a strength of the school. The mathematics leader, for example, has introduced a new, well-researched, whole-school approach to mathematics. This is already having a positive impact on staff knowledge and confidence and pupils' engagement, skill and delight in mathematics. Working with you, the mathematics leader has trained staff and then carefully monitored the effect of the training and the new approach on pupils' progress. You have been careful to ensure that the new mathematics approach is firmly embedded by amending aspects of it and thus making it appropriate to the needs of the pupils and staff at your school. Subject-related governors also assist in the monitoring of the effect of the new mathematics course. Pupils told me that they thoroughly enjoyed it and the ways it helped them clearly see their progress.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works effectively with staff and governors to monitor the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She assesses pupils' needs promptly and helps staff develop their skills through regular training sessions. Staff expectations for these pupils are high. Staff monitor their progress very carefully. As a result, these pupils make good progress from their starting points. Communications with parents are good.
- Pupils told me that they enjoy coming to school. Overall attendance is similar to the national average. The small number of families whose children are persistently absent are supported in a range of humane yet forthright ways. School staff visit homes promptly and agree strategies with parents and

carers to reduce absence. These strategies are then monitored very carefully to ensure that they have an effect on improving attendance. As a result, persistent absence is reducing steadily as parents understand and increasingly work with the school to ensure that their children attend regularly.

- Pupils are kind to each other. They are aware of the needs of others. They are also keen to do well. The school gives pupils many opportunities to develop their skills as leaders. It also emphasises the positive impact on learning of careful organisation and resilience. Pupils are very well behaved around school and in class. I saw no examples of pupils behaving inappropriately in lessons or around the school. The school's own records of behaviour show that poor behaviour is rare. The school is careful and appropriate in its support of pupils who, from time to time, find compliance with the school's high expectations for good behaviour challenging. Their parents and families are fully involved with the school in agreeing the best ways to support their children so that they get the very best out of their education.
- Pupils are safe. They say that they feel safe. They said that there are regular training sessions at school that help them keep themselves safe, including when online. They said that they knew about the range of forms that bullying can take and what to do if it happened to them or to a friend. They said that if they did feel anxious or concerned about anything, including bullying, they would tell a member of staff and that they were very confident that adults at the school would deal with it promptly and well.
- Parents are very satisfied with the education and care the school offers their children. They spoke with real energy about the care that the school takes to keep them informed of their child's well-being and progress. They also spoke positively about staff and their availability. As one parent said to me, 'I love this school!'

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the development of mathematics continues to be a high priority across the school with a particular emphasis on further developing staff's skills so that pupils deepen their enjoyment and make good progress in the fullest range of mathematical experiences
- they continue to develop and embed the wide-ranging and interesting knowledge and skills-based curriculum beyond English, mathematics, religious education and science, so that pupils are even better prepared for their next steps as learners and as thoughtful, considerate and informed citizens
- they continue to develop the roles of middle leaders so that they play the fullest part in developing staff's skills, including those of teaching assistants, so that all pupils of all abilities make strong progress and achieve as they should.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Middlesbrough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Middlesbrough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I visited all classes to observe learning and talk with pupils about their work. I was accompanied by you on all these visits. I scrutinised a range of pupils' books and folders. I spoke with you and other leaders, including the SENCo, the leader of early years and leaders of English and mathematics. I also spoke with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke on the telephone with an officer of Middlesbrough local authority school's service who has been supporting the school. I also met with the director of education for the Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough and with the chief executive officer of the Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust. I observed and spoke informally with pupils at the start of the day and during breaktime and lunchtime. I spoke with parents at the start of the day. I met with eight Year 5 pupils, formally, to discuss their views of the school. I also listened to, and discussed, reading with three Year 3 pupils. I took account of the views of 18 staff who responded to an anonymous survey undertaken during the inspection. I considered the five text messages from parents and the views of the 17 parents who responded to Ofsted's online facility, Parent View. I also considered the school's own recent surveys of pupils' and parents' views of the school. I read a range of documents about the school's progress, safeguarding systems, monitoring, staff training, attendance and governors' work.