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Mrs Sharon Fenwick
Headteacher
Our Lady and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Brooms
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Dear Mrs Fenwick

Short inspection of Our Lady and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Brooms

Following my visit to the school on 5 December 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 December 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The school has experienced some turbulence since the previous inspection. You acknowledge that this resulted in a decline in the quality of teaching and learning and a dip in staff morale. Pupils' progress in key stage 2 also declined, most significantly in writing and for those who are entitled to pupil premium funding. You and your team have now restored stability and pupils' progress in writing is increasing, but the legacy of this disruption has not been eradicated completely.

Staff are extremely committed to the school and keen to do their best for the pupils in their care. They are a close-knit team and helpful to each other personally and professionally. They cite the importance of colleagues in assisting them to improve their teaching, for example. You provide the opportunity for staff to enrich the curriculum through their own interests. For example, the school cook has been enabled to develop pupils' knowledge of food by running a kitchen garden, growing and cooking food and composting waste. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their lunches and their interest in food.

You and your team identified the need to address shortcomings in the quality of teaching and plug the gaps in pupils' learning. You are aware of the need for urgency

in ensuring that pupils' progress improves rapidly. As a result, you have initiated a rigorous system of weekly checks on pupils' work. This enables subject leaders to identify where support is required so that they can address any weaknesses promptly. Evidence in pupils' workbooks suggests that their progress is now accelerating in key stage 2. Alongside the weekly checks, you have enabled staff to become more confident in assessing pupils' work accurately. This means that there is a clearer picture of pupils' progress over time. When pupils are in danger of falling behind, steps are taken to ensure that they can keep pace with their classmates.

Middle and senior leaders are well supported to develop their areas of responsibility. They have received appropriate training and now have regular time to support their colleagues to improve. You enable them to work alongside external consultants to develop their own expertise. You have allocated all members of staff an area of responsibility which supports school development and complements their own expertise. For example, you identified the need for a parent support adviser to work with families, and a member of staff with relevant skills undertakes this role effectively.

Governors are very committed to improving the school. Recently, they have begun to evaluate most aspects of the school's work much more rigorously through a series of regular, focused visits, such as their checks on pupils' writing. However, this work is not yet contributing to rapid improvements. Governors are aware of how pupil premium funds are spent, but their scrutiny lacks rigour. Training has ensured that they have the skills to challenge leaders more effectively. Governors are mindful of the recent turbulence in the school and are keen to ensure that stability is maintained. They are planning carefully for any future changes which may take place.

You value the strong, caring ethos which pervades the school. All are welcomed, regardless of their capabilities or their background. You have a deep commitment to 'poverty proofing' so that no child misses out on the experiences the school offers. All pupils in school receive free fruit. One pupil I spoke to summarised the tolerance and fairness encouraged in school by responding to a question about stereotypes with, 'You can be what you want to be. That's fine.' Other pupils agreed.

The areas identified for improvement at the last inspection have only partially been addressed. You and your team have improved the quality of phonics teaching and it is now effective. Staff have good subject knowledge, teach pupils in a logical sequence and regularly check their understanding so that teaching is adjusted promptly. Consequently, an above-average proportion of pupils in key stage 1 attained the expected standard in reading and writing in 2018.

You have been less successful in improving the quality of outdoor learning for children in the Reception class, and this remains a school improvement priority. The final priority identified for improvement at the last inspection was to provide pupils, and especially the most able, with challenge in their learning. Teaching in reading, writing and mathematics is not consistently strong enough to ensure that pupils receive work that challenges and stretches them. Consequently, the proportions of pupils attaining at the higher standard remain below the national average in all subjects in both key stage 1 and key stage 2.

Your plans to improve pupils' education identify the right priorities. However, in your urgency to quicken the pace of pupils' progress and address the issues from the last inspection, you have planned for too much to be covered in a short space of time. This means that not enough time is devoted to ensuring that the main priorities are dealt with. Subject leaders report that they do not have enough time to ensure that new developments are introduced successfully. The plan also lacks clear timescales and milestones to enable leaders and governors to check that new developments are on track and making a difference to pupils' learning.

The vast majority of pupils behave well and they say that misbehaviour, when it occurs, is dealt with by adults. However, there is a very small group of pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour and misbehave frequently. The steps you have taken to support these pupils have not improved their behaviour well enough. Too often, this misbehaviour diverts some members of staff from their work to support other pupils' learning.

You now have rigorous systems in place to check pupils' absence, and this is followed up regularly. As a result, attendance is improving. The same rigour is not applied to gaining an overview of patterns of poor behaviour. All incidents are recorded, but there is no monitoring to identify any trends or patterns so that poor behaviour can be dealt with more promptly.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your team have a deep knowledge of pupils, and this is the basis of your work to safeguard them. You are equally alert to the challenges which are experienced within the local community. Staff are aware of what they need to do if they have a concern about a pupil, and all concerns are logged and followed up, if there is a need to do so. All training is up to date and measures have been taken to ensure that a number of staff have wider knowledge and skills so that there is always someone with greater expertise to consult in school.

You and your team work well with other agencies and are persistent in ensuring that pupils are safeguarded. The school's parent support adviser provides good support, using her knowledge well to help families in challenging circumstances. You provide good support such as counselling for pupils who are experiencing social and emotional difficulties.

Pupils feel safe in school. They have good relationships with adults and share concerns when they arise. They have a sound knowledge of what constitutes bullying and say that adults deal with it, if it occurs. They understand how to keep themselves safe online. They have learned about the dangers of misusing medicines and the effect that alcohol has on their health.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' progress in writing in key stage 2 has declined substantially in the last two years. Leaders' analysis of the reasons for this indicated that there was too much focus on the teaching of basic grammar and punctuation so pupils did not have enough opportunity to develop the skills expected for their age. The English leader identified that pupils did not use a wide and interesting range of vocabulary and that pupils' writing was not imaginative enough. She also identified that pupils lacked enthusiasm for writing.
- In response, a new, more systematic, approach to teaching writing has been introduced. Pupils study a novel or non-fiction text, and learning now builds up in a logical way over time. Evidence in pupils' books shows that pupils' progress in writing is beginning to accelerate consistently across all year groups. They are beginning to use a wider vocabulary and write with more imagination. The pupils I spoke to on the inspection also demonstrated their interest in the novels being studied.
- The English leader has engaged an author to work regularly with older pupils so that they can see the benefit and purpose of writing. They aim to publish some work by the end of the project. Pupils who were observed working with the author were attentive and engaged. The writing they have produced uses adventurous language, a wider vocabulary and imaginative ideas at a standard typical for their age.
- The local authority has provided effective support to the English leader to help improve the quality of teaching. Training has taken place to support teachers to demonstrate to pupils how to write well, and more training is planned. The English leader is aware that she needs to make more regular checks to ensure that this aspect of teaching is effective, but time has not been allocated to do so.
- No children in the Reception class reach standards in writing above those expected for their age, and proportions who reach the expected standard are below those nationally. Children do not write frequently enough to practise their skills. Evidence in the records of their learning showed that they rarely choose to write or mark-make during their play. There are too few opportunities to inspire writing, and the writing area is not inviting enough to encourage children to play there.
- I was keen to explore how well leaders used the pupil premium to support the group of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for support through this funding. Progress for the disadvantaged pupils has mirrored that of other pupils in the school and has declined in key stage 2. In the last three years, no pupil who is entitled to support from this funding has attained the higher standards in any key stage. Leaders know all pupils well, and social and emotional support for individual pupils is well targeted. General support to improve the quality of teaching and attendance is benefiting all pupils, including those deemed to be disadvantaged. Evidence in pupils' workbooks indicates that the progress of this group of pupils is improving, alongside that of other pupils. However, leaders do not have a strategic overview of the outcomes for this group of pupils to enable a more precise targeting of the funding so that these pupils make consistently good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of leadership and management improves by:
 - refining the school improvement plan to include only the main priorities, clear timescales and milestones which help to indicate that actions have been successful
 - providing more time for school priorities to be developed and then monitored more frequently
 - targeting pupil premium funds more precisely to help individual pupils overcome their barriers to achievement so that they make consistently good progress.
- standards in writing improve to enable pupils to make consistently good progress by:
 - continuing to develop the work already begun to enthuse pupils to write with a wider vocabulary and with more imagination, in line with expectations for their age
 - improving opportunities for children to write and mark-make in their play in the Reception class.
- pupils' behaviour improves so that it is consistently good by:
 - introducing clear procedures and actions to improve the behaviour of a small group of disruptive pupils
 - ensuring that behaviour incidents are regularly monitored to identify any patterns or trends which can be dealt with promptly.

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, the deputy headteacher and the English leader. I also met all teachers and teaching assistants. You and I visited lessons in each class. I met with a group of five governors and two other governors individually. I also met a representative from the local authority. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school, including their views of pupils' behaviour. I listened to some pupils read their own work and looked in their workbooks when in lessons. I also

carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work with the English leader. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, so I looked at the school's own parental survey and spoke to groups of parents and carers. I also looked at the school's own pupil survey and the four responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. I considered the six responses to Ofsted's online staff 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 achievement in national assessments and I looked at the school's website.