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Mrs Doreen King
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs King

Short inspection of St Bede's RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment, you, other leaders and staff have maintained a positive, welcoming and caring environment in which pupils feel safe, valued and happy. You, your leaders and staff have embraced the partnership working since you joined Carmel Education Trust in September 2018. Together, you, leaders and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust share a vision to provide the best possible outcomes for all pupils in your school.

You have successfully built a team of talented senior leaders. Together, you have an accurate view of the school's strengths and the areas that require further improvement. You lead a capable staff team, the members of which say that they feel respected and that their opinion is valued. They appreciate the support and professional development they have received from leaders within the school and from Carmel Education Trust. Consequently, the school has a culture that is aspirational to all pupils and staff.

Most parents and carers shared positive views about the school. They appreciate the care and education that their children receive. One parent commented: 'The school is like a family. Staff help children to grow and it's like one big team with the children at the centre.' Pupils are proud of their school and they are eager to learn. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their enjoyment of lessons, and the wide variety of educational visits that they access. One pupil commented: 'The teachers make the lessons fun, so you enjoy your learning.' Pupils talk maturely about how they

benefit from using the school prayer room to take time out to reflect or pray. Pupils display extremely positive attitudes to learning. They move around the school building sensibly, hold doors open for one another and play amicably together at breaktimes.

Following the previous inspection, there was a decline in the quality of pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2. Since your appointment you have successfully addressed this issue and, as a result, there has been a three-year improving trend in overall outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in all subjects.

You have addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection effectively. Leaders have focused sharply on improving the quality of writing across the curriculum. Outcomes in key stages 1 and 2 in 2018 were at the highest for three years. However, the proportion of boys attaining the higher standards in writing was below the national average in both key stages 1 and 2.

The previous inspection also identified the need for middle leaders to check on the quality of teaching and rate of pupils' progress in their subjects. You have provided effective support for leadership development, enabling middle leaders to understand the school system to track the performance of pupils. The school improvement partners within Carmel Education Trust have worked closely to develop the skills of middle leaders. As a result, all leaders in school are fully involved in monitoring teaching and pupils' progress in their subject areas.

The local governing body is responsible for the strategic development of the school. Governors work closely with you and other leaders to provide support and challenge regarding how well the school is doing. Governors recognise that the wide variety of experience and skills they bring to their roles helps them to check and evaluate information provided, then ask pertinent questions.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You recognise that pupils' safety and welfare is paramount; therefore, you have four designated safeguarding leads who share safeguarding responsibility. Together, you have established a strong culture of safeguarding. You have made sure that all training for staff and governors is up to date so that staff know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils' safety or welfare.

The vast majority of parents think that their children are safe in school, because adults look after their children well. Pupils say that the school is a safe place. They talk with confidence about how to stay safe, including when they are online. Pupils understand what constitutes bullying, but they say that it very rarely happens. They are confident that if bullying occurs, teachers will resolve any issues immediately.

Documents checked during the inspection show that all recorded incidents are detailed and, where necessary, relevant professionals from external agencies are involved. As a result, pupils and families receive the support they need.

Inspection findings

- By the end of key stage 2 in 2018, boys' attainment in mathematics was weaker compared to their attainment in other subjects. The proportion of boys and girls attaining the higher standards in mathematics was also below average. I looked at how teachers are challenging most-able pupils in mathematics and the quality of teaching in mathematics. Leaders monitor pupils' progress in mathematics closely. Pupils' books show that recently introduced changes to the teaching of mathematics have already improved the quality of pupils' ability to calculate with fluency, to reason and solve problems. This is resulting in current most-able pupils making strong progress in mathematics across key stage 2. However, some pupils struggle to fully understand the meaning of some of the complex mathematical vocabulary that is now used in lessons.
- By the end of key stage 1 in 2018, girls' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was much stronger than boys' attainment. The school's assessment information shows that the boys made good progress from their very low starting points at the beginning of Year 1. Over time, leaders have improved the quality of teaching and learning for boys in the early years. As a result, in 2018, the proportion of boys attaining a good level of development was above the national average. Therefore, most boys now leave Reception ready for Year 1.
- In 2018, the proportion of boys attaining the higher standard in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 was below the national average. I wanted to find out if teachers were providing sufficient challenge for pupils, particularly boys. Together with leaders, I looked at work in lessons and in books and we agreed that the proportion of current pupils working within a greater depth of learning has increased. However, pupils sometimes struggle to understand and use sophisticated language and vocabulary in their writing. Developing vocabulary is a current focus in writing across the school, but this is not yet fully embedded.
- You have established structured systems to monitor attendance and work closely with families whose children are frequently absent. Some improvements are evident. For example, the attendance rates of current pupils have improved, compared to the same period last year. However, attendance rates for pupils who are regularly absent have been declining over three years. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils. You agree that there are too many pupils who are persistently absent from school and you are working with individual families to overcome this issue.
- You and other leaders check on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make very carefully. Carmel Education Trust recently carried out a pupil premium audit. You have used the findings of this to compile a detailed plan which identifies barriers to learning as well as targeted activities. Together, we spent time looking at the work of disadvantaged pupils in the classroom and learning over time in their books. The majority of current disadvantaged pupils are generally making good progress from their relative starting points across key stages 1 and 2.

- During the inspection, we spent time considering the work of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In lessons and pupils' books we found that work is matched appropriately or adapted to meet their needs. Pupils with SEND receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants. Current pupils with SEND make good progress from their individual starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to embed the recently implemented approaches to writing to increase the proportion of pupils, in particular boys, who attain higher standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2
- continue to embed the recently implemented approaches to mathematics to increase the proportion of pupils who attain higher standards at the end of key stage 2
- improve the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent from school, in particular those who are disadvantaged.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Aitchison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and senior and middle leaders, the CEO of Carmel Education Trust and members of the governing body. I observed learning during lessons and learning walks across the school with you and with your senior leaders. During these lessons, I spoke with pupils and looked at their books. I spoke with pupils when I observed behaviour at breaktime and met formally with pupils from Years 1 to 6 to discuss their learning and views of the school. I listened to four pupils read. I also examined a sample of pupils' mathematics and writing books. I looked at a range of documentation relating to safeguarding, and pupils' attainment, progress and attendance. I also considered the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan. I checked on the school's recruitment and induction procedures for staff and volunteers. I met with the school improvement partners from the multi-academy trust. I considered the 44 responses to Parent View, including responses to Ofsted's free-text service. I also spoke with

parents and carers at the beginning of the school day. I considered the 16 responses to the staff survey and one pupil response to the online pupil survey.