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Mrs Bernadette Rizzi-Allan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Rizzi-Allan

### **Short inspection of St Bede's Catholic Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 2016, 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 October 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is now part of the Carmel Education Trust and benefits from working collaboratively with other schools in this trust. You have a very clear vision for the school. Your staff, governors and directors from the trust share your high ambitions for the pupils of St Bede's Academy.

Since taking up your appointment in September 2014, you have been resolute in your determination to ensure that every pupil at your school gets the best possible education which will result in enhanced life chances. You prioritised well, given the vast amount of improvements which needed to be made, and you have achieved much success for your pupils. You have been tenacious in halting declining standards, particularly in writing. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning has continued to improve under your leadership, which has resulted in pupils making at least good progress in most subjects.

You have created a vibrant and stimulating school environment to give your pupils the best possible opportunities to succeed. Pupils and their well-being are at the heart of everything you do at this school. You have high expectations of what pupils can achieve which are shared by your staff, and you do not let individual pupils' circumstances act as a barrier to their making good progress. If pupils need additional resources to ensure that they can complete homework to a high standard, you willingly provide them. If parents need help and guidance through being in difficult situations, you give them what they need, regardless of the

financial implications. You always go the extra mile for your pupils and their families and this is reaping rewards. Pupils are happy. They come to school with smiles on their faces, and they relish the opportunities they are given, resulting in their achieving well. Parents appreciate this and are overwhelmingly positive about the school.

You encourage and support the development of not just your senior and middle leaders but also the rest of your hard-working and effective staff. The school has experienced some significant turbulence historically, with many staff working for short periods of time, and then leaving. Your arrival in 2013, with your drive and resolve, has resulted in staff wanting to remain at this school, improving their skills and joining you on the improvement journey. Their commitment to improvement means that pupils are consistently making good progress now, as they improve their practice and share their knowledge. You have given opportunities for less experienced members of staff to shadow some of your senior leaders in their leadership roles, and for teachers to observe good practice in other classrooms. Your foresight in succession planning has resulted in a smooth transition for your 'new to leadership' teachers.

At the last inspection, the headteacher was asked to improve the quality of teaching in reading, writing and mathematics by sharing the exemplary teaching practice seen in some parts of the school. This was to ensure that pupils know what they can do to improve their work, and to make sure that lessons are challenging for all pupils. We also agreed that, in addition to these, during the inspection I would focus on what leaders were doing to improve attendance levels, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils.

Strategies to improve writing and mathematics have ensured that pupils are now attaining above other pupils nationally, in both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Pupils' work shows that they are making good progress in all year groups. Due to low levels of prior attainment in reading, pupils are not attaining as well. However, you have already identified this and are currently implementing actions to achieve similar success to that achieved with pupils' writing and mathematics. The most able pupils are making good progress, similar to their peers. However, they need to be making rapid progress to catch up to their peers nationally, both in key stage 1 and key stage 2.

It was evident when speaking to pupils, both informally around the school and during a formal meeting, that they thrive on the opportunities which are now given to them. This is reflected in the improving attendance rates for all pupils, including boys and those who are disadvantaged. Your fastidious approach to ensuring that pupils attend regularly is paying dividends. You have engaged guidance and support from external agencies in your quest to ensure that most pupils from different countries attend school, particularly when this may not have been the expectation in their home country. You have worked with families to support them to understand what regular attendance can mean in terms of academic and social progress. As a result, their attendance has improved significantly. These pupils now attend well. For those pupils who regularly miss school, you and your team have

persevered. You visit family homes regularly, escort pupils into school, buy alarm clocks and send early morning reminders to pupils to get up. Although initially this did not make you popular with those families, it has resulted in significant improvement in attendance rates and a large drop in the number of pupils who are persistently absent.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

A key strength of the school is how well you, your team and your governors take every action possible to keep pupils safe. This is your key priority, which is resulting in pupils and their families benefiting immensely from this special care, guidance and support. While the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality, it is the everyday actions occurring which highlight the lengths staff go to in order to keep pupils safe.

Working with the 'Bungalow Partnership', vulnerable children and families in crisis, including asylum-seekers and refugees, access support through counselling and behavioural and play therapy. Leaders ensure that this begins within 48 hours of pupils and families arriving at the school, and continues until the family no longer needs that help. Staff training on sensitive subjects such as protecting children from radicalisation and extremism, child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation has led to referrals being made to the relevant experts to ensure that pupils are protected from harm. In addition, staff awareness sessions around issues specifically relating to this school are provided to heighten their awareness of signs of harm, and how to respond to families with different beliefs and cultures in terms of keeping pupils safe. The school is also part of 'Operation Encompass', working in partnership with Cleveland Police during instances of domestic violence. Prompt action from leaders ensures that pupils who may need support and counselling immediately after these incidents are provided with it.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your leaders have prioritised areas for improvement successfully since the previous inspection. A rigorous analysis of the quality of teaching and learning resulted in improvements being made swiftly in writing and mathematics. This has had a significant impact on the amount of progress pupils make.
- Pupils feel very proud of being part of St Bede's Academy. Their new uniform, which is heavily subsidised by the school, provides pupils with an unashamed joy that their school 'is the best one in Stockton'.
- Your key focus since joining the school has been on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils achieve just as well as their peers nationally. Not only have you and your staff managed to achieve this, those pupils are achieving better than others nationally in writing in key stage 1 and in writing and mathematics in key stage 2.
- Differences in attainment and progress for disadvantaged pupils across all year

groups have been eradicated. This is as a result of focused identification of vulnerable pupils, offering structured programmes of support for fine and gross motor skill development, and thoughtful planning of literacy and numeracy activities, among other key strategies. Now, all pupils are making good progress.

- Pupils are now making better progress in writing than they were previously, due to your determination to improve this. Working with your leaders, you raised the profile of writing and its importance by making sure that all pupils carried out at least one piece of quality writing per week, which is 'focus marked'. Pupils are clear about how they can be successful in their writing, regardless of their ability, and have clear targets they are aiming for.
- Implementation of a new strategy to improve mathematics 18 months ago has ensured that pupils are now making good progress. This systematic approach to teaching mathematics ensures that pupils develop their skills in a wide range of contexts, to deepen their knowledge and to apply their skills to show a solid understanding of key concepts.
- The teaching of phonics has improved over time and is now at least good. Pupils are being taught well, according to their ability. The impact of this is significant. In 2012, 35% of pupils achieved the expected standard in the national phonics check, compared with 88% of pupils in 2016. This is above what is found nationally.
- You have rightly identified that reading needs to improve and have started to implement initiatives so that pupils can achieve the same success as they do in writing and mathematics. Full class sets of challenging books have been purchased along with dictionaries, and you have introduced competitions for 'word of the week'. 'Fab vocab' displays in classrooms are being used effectively to develop pupils' vocabulary skills. An increased focus on developing pupils' comprehension skills and more focused guided reading sessions are ensuring that pupils are now making better progress. However, due to low prior attainment, they need to make more rapid progress to catch up.
- Leaders have implemented a new policy for marking and feedback since the previous inspection. It is used to good effect, particularly in writing, where pupils are clear how to improve their writing skills. It is not applied as consistently in mathematics and is not as focused on moving learning on. You are aware of this and are taking action to address this.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a clear strength of the school. Behaviour and conduct in lessons and around the school are very good. 'Table manners' cards on the lunchtime tables, with tablecloths and flowers, result in pupils developing their social skills well. Acts of kindness are celebrated on the 'kindness tree', and the prominent display in the centre of the hall demonstrates a solid commitment to providing equal opportunities for all.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are challenged further to make rapid progress to achieve higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics
- the profile of reading is raised across the school to make sure that all pupils make faster progress from their starting points.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive of the Carmel Education Trust, 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 Stockton-On-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Lithgow  
**Senior Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior and middle leaders, the chief executive of the Carmel Education Trust and four members of the governing body. I visited classrooms with you to observe the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I scrutinised the pupils' work including writing and mathematics. I heard a range of pupils read. I spoke with a range of parents, pupils in lessons and a selected group of pupils at lunchtime about the school. I also reviewed information from the 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as surveys collated recently by the school. I evaluated recent information about the progress pupils make across the school and how the accuracy of assessments is secured. I considered the school improvement plans and other documents including the outcomes of monitoring activities and reports to governors and the Carmel Education Trust.