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Mrs Sarah Hobbs
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St Cuthbert's RC Junior and Infant (NC) School
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Dear Mrs Hobbs

Short inspection of St Cuthbert's RC Junior and Infant (NC) School

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 2017, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. One parent wrote, 'Mrs Hobbs appears to know all the children individually and leads the school in a caring and progressive way and it is clear that everyone at the school wants the best for the children they teach.'

Since the previous inspection, five teachers across key stages 1 and 2 have left the school for a variety of reasons. For example, for promotion, retirement or a failure to meet your high standards and expectations. You have managed the changes and recruitment process well. You have appointed four teachers relatively new to the profession. You support and train these, and other, staff well. Leaders appointed since the previous inspection, including your deputy headteacher, make a positive contribution to the running of the school and have added to the school's capacity to secure further improvements.

A positive culture based on Catholic values underpins the school's work. All of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire agree that the school promotes a supportive and inclusive culture that ensures that the very large majority of pupils achieve well academically and in their personal development. One parent commented, 'The school is run with the children at the heart of every decision made. The staff continually strive to improve the education they provide.' I agree with this view.

You and your staff have taken effective steps to address the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. You have introduced new systems to make sure teachers check pupils' progress frequently and accurately, including in the early years and Year 1. As pupils move up the school, teachers use the information from the pupil's previous class teacher successfully to plan appropriate learning and support activities in order that pupils' achieve well. You work in partnership with local schools to moderate the standards achieved and, where necessary, adjust teachers' assessments so that they are fair and accurate. You and your leadership team make sure that teachers use what they know about pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills to inform their planning and this ensures that work is set at the right level. Teachers know how well all groups of pupils are doing and this means that teachers and teaching assistants quickly identify pupils who are falling behind and provide suitable help and support to help them catch up with their classmates. Information provided by the school and a scrutiny of pupils' books shows that the most able pupils are doing well across all year groups in a range of subjects.

Governors have a broad range of knowledge and expertise which enables them to carry out their statutory roles and responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Governors make sure that the pupil premium and school sports funds are suitably used. As a result, disadvantaged and the most able disadvantaged pupils do well across a range of subjects, especially in key stage 2. Governors are very supportive of you and other staff and recognise the successful way in which you have addressed the areas for development and the challenges since the previous inspection. Governors have an understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement as a result of the information you provide. However, they do not have a secure understanding of how to use external information such as the inspection dashboard confidently in order to challenge your assertions about pupils' attainment and progress based on this information.

The teaching of mathematics is a strength of the school. Pupils use their mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills confidently and fluently. The work in pupils' books shows that they are able to solve increasingly difficult problems effectively and to give clear reasons for their working out and subsequent answers. As a result, the large majority of pupils, including the most able pupils, are doing well in this subject and standards in mathematics are rising.

You make sure that the whole school community understands the importance of regular attendance and punctuality. As a result, pupils' rates of attendance have been consistently above national averages and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent is lower than that found nationally.

Pupils' good behaviour makes a positive contribution to an orderly and relaxed learning environment in and out of lessons. The work in pupils' books shows that they take their learning seriously and want to do their best. Their work is well presented, neat and accurate and, in most instances, completed to the best of their ability. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and pupils respond

accordingly. As a result, there are very few incidents of poor behaviour and, in your time as headteacher, you have not had to exclude any pupils. When asked, pupils say that bullying is very rare and that staff deal with it quickly and effectively when it happens.

You have forged excellent relationships with parents. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire appreciate the support, help and guidance their child receives. They recognise the academic and social progress their child makes as a result of the effective teaching and care the school provides. Parents also appreciate the effective levels of communication you provide through, 'texts, newsletters and activities in school'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You and members of the governing body ensure that safeguarding is at the heart of the school's work. One parent spoke for many when she said, 'The care of children is second to none.' As the designated safeguarding lead, you regularly and effectively update the records of pupils who are potentially or actually at risk. The school supports vulnerable pupils and their families very well. You access support from outside agencies quickly to make sure that social and welfare issues do not escalate. You are tenacious in following up any delay in support and make sure that pupils and their families get the help that they need. The checks on staff's suitability to work with children are thorough and detailed. For example, you check and verify any gaps in the applicant's employment or education. Staff receive regular suitable child protection training. For example, on aspects such as child sexual exploitation and recognising when pupils may be drawn into situations of harm, including when using social media online. As a result, staff are confident in using the school's systems to raise concerns.

Governors have a very good knowledge of their statutory responsibilities. They regularly monitor the school's logs of safeguarding concerns and pupils' attendance and behaviour to make sure that staff are keeping pupils safe and secure. Governors make sure that the school's computers have appropriate software on them to ensure pupils' safety.

Pupils' understanding of how to identify and deal with risks and dangers is well developed. You have a clear understanding of the local issues or situations that pose possible risks and you make sure that pupils have the right information in order to be safe. For example, pupils have specific lessons on road, water and rail safety as the school is situated close to roads, canals and railways.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we agreed that I would check the effectiveness of the school's actions to improve: pupils' writing skills in key stage 2; the reading and writing skills of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in

key stages 1 and 2; key stage 1 pupils' reading, writing and phonics skills; pupils' progress in science; children's communication and language, literacy and mathematics knowledge, skills and understanding in the early years. We chose these key lines of enquiry as you agreed that, in 2016, not all pupils did as well as they could have done in these areas at the end of Reception, key stage 1 and 2 and in phonics at the end of Year 1.

- You and your deputy headteacher have a very clear understanding about the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. You have taken action to address underperformance and provide effective levels of support to those who are newly or recently qualified.
- You have put in place a number of whole-school measures to ensure that current pupils make better progress in reading, writing and phonics across the school. For example, you provide additional training for staff on developing pupils' skills to decode letters and to pronounce and understand unfamiliar words. My scrutiny of pupils' work and listening to pupils read confirm that focused support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or are of lower- or middle-ability is making a difference and helping them to make better progress. In addition, pupils' outcomes in the phonics screening check in Year 2, for those who did not meet the expected standard in Year 1, are above national figures. The deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator, knows the pupils and their needs well. He ensures that the school's provision does meet their specific needs. For example, the pastoral care you provide for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a strength of the school.
- Your actions to improve pupils' writing are well considered. As a result, pupils have a better understanding of how to use language skilfully for different purposes and audiences. For example, pupils understand the most appropriate style when writing letters or telling stories. Pupils have an increasing understanding of how to use punctuation and grammatical features to set out their ideas accurately and effectively, for example when creating mood or tension. However, you accept that a few pupils still need to improve the quality of their handwriting, spelling and use of grammar.
- You say that developing pupils' reading skills has been an ongoing focus for the school as pupils often arrive with low literacy levels. During their time at St Cuthbert's, it is clear that the large majority of pupils develop a love of books and are keen to read regularly. Most-able pupils read fluently and with expression. Teachers challenge the most able pupils to read a range of increasingly difficult texts. Teachers and teaching assistants support lower-ability pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well to read fluently. However, you agree that a few lower- and middle-ability pupils do not understand what they have read or the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- You have modified the science curriculum in order to improve pupils' outcomes in this subject. As a result, pupils' scientific understanding is improving as they carry out numerous experiments to explore and find reasons for how science works in a range of different situations and contexts. The work in pupils' books shows that pupils are doing well in science across the school. The quality of pupils' writing and scientific understanding is of a high standard as they hypothesise about what they might find and then give plausible reasons for what they have found out.

Pupils who spoke with me during this inspection said that they now enjoy science much more and have a greater understanding of different aspects of science, such as physics. However, you rightly identify that pupils' reading for understanding and a lack of subject-specific vocabulary sometimes limits pupils' science progress.

- Since the previous inspection you and your early years leader have made sure that the indoor and outdoor environments stimulate and develop children's communication, language and numeracy skills effectively. You have done this through attractive displays of high frequency age-specific words, numbers and instructions such as 'push' and 'pull'. In addition, you provide resources and equipment that encourage children to explore, discover and talk about what they are doing. Teachers and teaching assistants encourage children to think about their learning through the use of effective questions and tasks. It is clear that the focus on developing children's language and communication skills is paying dividends as attainment is rising and the number of children attaining a good level of development at the end of Reception is rising. You and your early years leader have developed excellent relationships with parents. Parents speak very highly of the early years provision and how they are actively involved in their child's learning. As a result of this ongoing work, children currently in early years do well across all areas of learning from sometimes very low starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors understand and use external information such as the inspection dashboard or RAISEonline report to evaluate and compare pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour and attendance against national figures
- lower- and middle-ability pupils already supported by the school continue to develop their handwriting, spelling and grammar in order to improve their writing skills
- lower- and middle-ability pupils already supported by the school continue to develop their reading skills so that they are able to have a greater understanding of what they have read
- pupils across the school understand and use a wider range of vocabulary across all subjects, particularly in science.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I agreed to focus on the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection. The effectiveness of leaders' and governors' actions to improve:

- pupils' writing skills in key stage 2
- the reading and writing skills of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in key stages 1 and 2
- pupils' reading, writing and phonics skills in key stage 1
- pupils' progress in science
- children's communication and language, literacy and mathematics knowledge, skills and understanding in the early years.

I also explored the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements.

I carried out the following activities during the inspection to explore these areas:

- met with you, the deputy headteacher, the early years leader and members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body
- scrutinised the school website and a number of school documents including: safeguarding records; policies and procedures, including the checks on staff's suitability to work with children; staff training and referrals to outside agencies; information about pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour and attendance; minutes of the meetings of governors; and information about pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- heard pupils read
- spoke to pupils informally about their learning, behaviour and how they keep safe
- visited lessons with you across the school and scrutinised and evaluated work in an extensive range of books
- considered the 35 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 37 comments received electronically, the 28 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.