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Miss Marie Peart
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Front Street
Stanley
County Durham
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Dear Miss Peart

Short inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Stanley

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. It is to your great credit that you have continued to lead and develop the school effectively despite the recent absence of the substantive headteacher. You have determinedly ensured that your highly motivated team provides pupils at St Joseph's with the highest quality care and teaching you can offer. You demonstrate a determination that academic standards will continue to improve. As a result, parents' satisfaction with the school is extremely high; almost every parent who responded to Parent View and everyone I spoke to during the inspection would recommend the school to others. Typically, they describe St Joseph's as 'a wonderful school where teachers encourage, support and nurture the children beautifully'. Parents describe teachers as 'enthusiastic and welcoming to children and parents'.

You have successfully tackled the issues identified in the previous inspection report. Evidence shows that you have extended opportunities to involve teachers further in the analysis of pupils' progress towards termly targets. As a result of this regular analysis, all pupils, both individuals and groups, make at least good progress in all year groups. The good quality of teaching has been consolidated further because activities in reading, writing and mathematics are closely matched to pupils' abilities and teachers ensure that pupils make maximum progress. However, there are issues that you know the school has to address and you have correctly listed these among your school development priorities. They include the need to ensure that the high standard of work seen in English and mathematics is also matched by high-

quality work in all subjects, particularly in science, history and geography. In addition, you have identified that boys' writing needs to be improved in key stage 1 and you have started to tackle this robustly. As a result, the standard of boys' writing is already improving.

Together with the strong governing body, you hold teachers stringently to account for their work. As a result of your strong leadership and clear direction, you have successfully achieved improved teaching and above-average attainment. Standards are significantly above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics in key stages 1 and 2. In addition, you have secured rapid improvements to children's achievement in the early years so the proportion of children achieving a good level of development also exceeds the national average. The good quality of teaching in core subjects illustrates your capacity to bring about further improvements.

Pupils were observed running and skipping to school in the morning with beaming faces. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is a delight. In lessons, pupils engage in purposeful discussion about their learning. They have a clear understanding of the things they do well and where they need to improve. They are eager to talk about what they have learned and demonstrate a keen sense of responsibility to find things out for themselves.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your ongoing commitment to this area of work is demonstrated by the care you show when pupils arrive at school and leave at the end of the day. You make rigorous checks on all adults to make sure that they are suitable to work with children.

Staff act as effective role models for pupils in the way they talk, act and behave towards each other and with children. They are vigilant in their approach to pupils' welfare and they know individual pupils, their families and their needs well. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure; parents agree with this.

Safeguarding procedures are effectively applied. Leaders are tenacious when working with other partners and agencies to provide support for those families who need it. The school's website and weekly newsletters provide a comprehensive range of helpful information on e-safety. Record-keeping is thorough and shows the school's emphasis on ensuring that pupils' personal needs are met. Aspects of keeping pupils safe are woven cleverly into the school's curriculum.

Inspection findings

- Governors and leaders share an ambition and passion to drive improvement so that the school is the best it can be. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are highly effective in providing challenge to support school improvement. Together, you have developed robust systems to check the progress of pupils. Governors use this information to hold you and your teachers to account. Consequently, governors' effective and strategic work

continues to support school improvement.

- You have developed an effective curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils and pupils develop an inquisitive nature. Their enthusiasm and enjoyment are clear. The school does much to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are highly reflective about matters of personal responsibility and belief. Cultural visits, such as one to the Oriental Museum, provide pupils with opportunities to consider communities which are different to their own.
- However, teachers do not have the same high expectations in subjects such as science, history and geography as they do in English and mathematics. As a result, pupils do not, for example, show clear strengths in the ability to draw thoughtful assumptions from historical sources, neither do they consider carefully enough how to plan and refine experiments in science. Leaders have not monitored the wider curriculum closely enough and older pupils in particular say that they do not do enough art.
- The early years class provides a very effective start for children and they make rapid progress. Children gain strong phonic skills in the Reception Year and this continues through key stage 1. The proportion of pupils who pass the Year 1 phonics screening check is consistently above the national average. This good start to pupils' education is reflected in their consistently high achievement. Many pupils make speedy progress throughout the school to reach the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave St Joseph's.
- The small proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school make at least good progress and often make rapid progress. This is because your teachers match activities to pupils' needs and provide them with helpful advice to improve. As a result, they achieve standards at least in line with those of other pupils nationally, and often above. Leaders and governors alike ensure that they receive thorough reports on the progress of this group of pupils.
- Leaders emphasise the importance of good attendance through the school's website, weekly newsletters and rewards. The breakfast club has played a significant part in getting pupils to arrive on time and ready to learn. The overall attendance of pupils is above average. The persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils was high last year. However, you have been successful in working with external agencies to tackle this problem and to provide families with the support they need to improve the attendance of their children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers show high expectations when planning pupils' learning in science, history and geography, so that pupils acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding expected for their age in these subjects and have opportunities to exceed them
- leaders more closely monitor the provision of the wider curriculum to ensure that pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum.

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

Stephen Bywater
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the senior leadership team and other staff. A meeting was held with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I had a conversation with a representative of the local authority. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plans were scrutinised, along with information about pupils' progress and safeguarding documents. I listened to pupils read and talked with a group of pupils about their views of school. You accompanied me on short visits to every class in school. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school and looked at pupils' books. The 37 responses from parents to the Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including their written comments, were considered. I also took account of the 30 survey responses by pupils and 12 survey responses from staff.