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Mrs Barbara Brown
Headteacher
Sacred Heart RC Primary School
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Dear Mrs Brown

Short inspection of Sacred Heart RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up your appointment in January 2014, you have been steadfast in pursuing your vision for the school. Your quest to secure the best possible outcomes and experiences for all pupils has not, however, been without challenge. Your ability to identify key improvement priorities accurately, and manage instability in staffing resourcefully, has been particularly critical in maintaining standards. As a result of your tenacity, this key area for improvement from the previous inspection has been met; good-quality teaching and learning has endured. Pupils, as a result, make at least good progress in most subjects.

You have established a warm, inclusive and distinctively spiritual ethos across the school. Prevalent are core Christian values which you actively promote and weave through the fabric of the curriculum. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain, displaying tolerance, respect and interest in others and the world around them. They are excited by the stimulating improvements that you have made to the outdoor environment; the poly tunnel and raised garden beds are firm favourites.

Pupils feel safe, happy and well looked after, as their good attendance attests. The calm, orderly environment is enabling. Parents and pupils agree that children behave well. Parents are confident that good care is taken of their children but have found the changes in staffing unsettling. You understand the need to continue to work with parents to address their concerns and allay their fears. You and

governors are committed to strengthening positive partnerships with parents further.

In order to boost leadership capacity and drive up standards, you appointed a deputy headteacher in September 2015. She works closely with all staff, supporting the newest members in particular, to reach and sustain your high expectations in the classroom. Together, with other senior leaders, you monitor the effectiveness of teaching, rigorously, particularly with regards to English and mathematics, meeting a further challenge expressed in the previous inspection. Your firm belief that 'quality-first' teaching in the classroom is crucial to pupils' success leads you to secure beneficial internal and external professional development opportunities for all staff. Consequently, staff feel supported as well as challenged to improve their practice; they are held fully accountable for pupils' outcomes. Your recent focus on boys' reading and girls' mathematics has ensured that rates of progress for current groups have increased. You are cognisant of the need to rapidly address issues that you have rightly identified for some pupils with regards to science and have taken steps to do so.

The previous report challenged you to better meet the needs of the most able pupils. As a result of your actions, they are now making good progress. In 2016, the proportion of pupils reaching greater depths of learning in key stage 2 surpassed the national average in all subjects. The picture for the most able pupils in key stage 1 has been more variable historically, but in 2016 the proportions reaching greater depths in mathematics and writing also exceeded those seen nationally. Boys' reading in key stage 1 was an area you correctly identified as needing additional scrutiny. Having taken action to address underlying issues, the majority are now making faster progress and catching up rapidly with girls. You recognise that by offering Reception children further opportunities to practise and apply their skills in reading and writing, their ability to fully master the demands of the key stage 1 curriculum will be boosted.

Teachers use assessment effectively across key stages to meet the needs of most pupils. Staff ensure that individual pupils fully understand what they need to do to improve their work across subjects. Challenge tasks are readily available for pupils of all abilities, meaning pupils do not waste time practising things they already know or can do. Same day intervention principles mean that pupils' misconceptions are tackled promptly. Some parents would welcome more clarity about the school's assessment procedures and the manner in which their children's progress through the curriculum is captured. You accept that the assessment system can be further refined to communicate more precisely pupils' attainment.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are rightfully fit for purpose. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils are rigorous. Several leaders have undertaken safer recruitment training so that possible risks when making new appointments are minimised. Staff and governors benefit from regular child protection training which equips them with the skills

needed to identify potential signs of harm, abuse or extremism. Parents work with you to ensure that their children attend regularly and punctually. No groups are adversely affected by poor attendance.

Pupils say they feel safe. They are appreciative of the steps that you have taken to make them feel secure and can discuss the dangers of using the internet and working online. Pupils are confident that adults will listen if they have worries. They feel certain that any concerns they discuss will be treated seriously: 'No one bullies anyone in our school... occasional arguments are sorted out.'

Governors, leaders and the site manager conscientiously maintain the school environment and grounds to a high standard. Fences are secure and a safe entry/exit system is in place. Any repairs needed in and across the site are quickly attended to. The safekeeping of children is at the centre of all endeavours.

Inspection findings

- Reception children enter school with broadly typical skills and capabilities. The curriculum is well-resourced indoors and outside. Children are stimulated and engaged by the activities on offer. They move confidently around school and beyond. The school's minibuses are used well to colour and enhance children's experiences; excursions enrich vocabulary and lay memories for later life. The 'residential' sleepover in Whitby was a particularly exciting occasion, fostering skills of independence. There is, however, scope to further the extent to which children practise and apply their skills of reading and in particular, writing, within the early years.
- Mathematics and English leaders contribute effectively to school improvement planning. They create tailored action plans based on accurate evaluation. Each monitors closely the progress that pupils make in their area of responsibility, across key stages. Where needed, initiatives and resources have been put in place and teachers are challenged and supported to hone their skills. Better outcomes for pupils are the result. New practical mathematical resources supported groups of pupils to understand tricky concepts. Daily arithmetic sessions and stepped challenge tasks have enhanced pupils' reasoning and number skills. Due to changes in staff and a shifting of responsibilities however, leadership of science has been less robust.
- Governors have 'ratcheted up' their contributions over time. They seek tangible, first-hand evidence to assure themselves that pupils' outcomes and learning are firmly at the centre of leaders' endeavours. To this end, they visit school regularly, taking part in clubs, events and the daily goings-on wherever possible. Governors' skills are audited to ensure that they have the breadth of experience and expertise needed to fulfil their duties in challenging and supporting leaders. They also examine carefully the use of funding to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, the majority of pupils make at least good progress.
- Teachers have strong, enabling relationships with pupils. Classrooms are bright, well organised and rich in literacy and numeracy displays. Teachers provide an

array of challenge tasks in mathematics and English, supporting all pupils to deliberate carefully about their work. As a result, pupils become engrossed in their learning and behaviour is good. No matter their starting point, pupils debate and discuss new concepts and strategies avidly, finding the most efficient way to complete their work to a good standard. On occasion, these good practices and attitudes are less evident when scientific content is being tackled.

- Pupils read regularly with adults. They told the inspector that they enjoy reading both in school and at home. Boys in particular have felt inspired by a number of author visits to school and new reading materials. Book-focused projects have also awakened children's excitement and interest in reading for pleasure. Your work to lift the profile of reading and books is evident.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leadership and pupils' progress in science are prioritised in improvement plans
- Reception children practise and apply their skills of writing more often
- the assessment system is refined and communicated clearly to parents
- leaders address parents' concerns regarding the instability in staffing.

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 Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I spent time with you and your deputy headteacher. We jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in classes across the school. I scrutinised work in pupils' books, spoke with pupils from each key stage and considered the 26 responses by pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your school improvement plans. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also held telephone discussions with representatives from the local authority. I talked with parents at the school gate, taking account of 31 free-text comments and 61 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Staff did not complete Ofsted's online questionnaire; however, 16 members of staff submitted written comments expressing their views. During this short inspection, I paid particular attention to the

effectiveness of the reading curriculum, the quality of mathematics teaching in key stage 1, the leadership of science and the effectiveness of the pupil premium funding spend.