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Miss J Jones
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Dear Miss Jones

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Murton

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a welcoming, friendly and inclusive school where pupils are happy and inquisitive. Despite significant turbulence in terms of staffing and building constraints, you and governors have rightly ensured that pupils, their safety and the progress that they make come first. This means that your actions and vision for improvement are firmly centred on the correct priorities. In 2017, in both key stages 1 and 2, pupils' outcomes at the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and science were above those seen nationally. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has risen year on year and in 2017 was above the national average.

Recommendations from the previous inspection challenged you to improve teaching further. You and other leaders have tackled this requirement diligently: teaching and learning are good. Leaders' work, staff meetings and training aim appropriately on continually honing adults' subject skills, knowledge and understanding. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning alongside thorough performance management arrangements mean that staff are held suitably to account for pupils' progress. Staff are proud to work here. They know what leaders expect of them and they feel valued as well as supported.

The previous report also asked you to improve pupils' progress in writing. Pupils now have frequent opportunities to write at length across the curriculum. Many

pupils say that they enjoy writing and get to write about things that interest them. In partnership with the English coordinator, you have made sure that teachers know how to develop pupils' skills through good-quality training, by sharing best practices and by scrutinising pupils' writing together. As a result, pupils' outcomes in writing have improved measurably. In 2017, a higher proportion of pupils in both key stages 1 and 2 met the expected standards in writing, in comparison to other schools nationally. You agree, however, that the most able pupils, including those in the early years, need further challenge to ensure that their progress in writing is as rapid as that of others.

Significant changes in staffing recently have led you to restructure adults' roles and duties. You are supporting staff new to subject and role responsibilities successfully. Staff feel excited about the opportunities presented. You make sure that staff have the time and resources they need to manage their duties effectively. You also ensure that staff have appropriate access to advice and guidance, internally and externally. Some subject leaders' improvement plans, however, need further refinement. Timelines, specific actions and success criteria are not as clear on some plans as others. Fittingly, you have already identified this as an area for development and are working with adults to review and sharpen their action plans. As per your core purpose, you intend each plan to be a purposeful vehicle to make the improvements needed in terms of pupils' achievements across the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have a comprehensive understanding of your role in protecting pupils and keeping them safe from harm. You, governors and staff take these responsibilities seriously and have appropriately vigilant attitudes. You have ensured that staff, including those new to school, are suitable to work with children; checks are thorough and well documented. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for. Pupils say that adults are 'fun and kind'. They are confident that adults in school will listen and support them if they have any worries. Due to building constraints, pupils in Year 4 are currently working with staff in the church hall across the road from the school. You have ensured that the church hall environment is a safe, suitably equipped environment. Year 4 pupils told me that they enjoy this arrangement and do not feel isolated because they can socialise with their friends during breaktimes. They too feel safe and say that adults listen to their opinions and always take time to escort them safely across the road.

Staff receive regular training and updates in terms of their duties to protect and care for children. They understand how and to whom they should report any concerns that they may have. Work with external experts and agencies is timely and records are well-maintained. Information about safeguarding and child protection on the school's website, however, is not up to date or in keeping with the documentation and procedures on-site. You are working with governors to ensure that this discrepancy is swiftly addressed.

Inspection findings

- You know your school well. You and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas which require further development. You are very honest in your judgements and evaluation of the school's performance. Despite the good outcomes that you secure for pupils, there is no room for complacency in your aspirational vision for improvement. You are, for example, determined and clear as to the correct priorities to ensure that a higher proportion of pupils reach the greater depths of learning in writing.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan work carefully to ensure that it matches the interests and needs of pupils across the curriculum. Outcomes for pupils have remained in line with, or better than, national averages across subjects and key stages over time. In 2017, pupils' progress in key stage 2 in reading and writing was in the top 10% of schools nationally. At times, however, teachers do not challenge the most able pupils sufficiently to reach a deeper understanding and sophistication in their writing. The proportion of pupils writing with a greater depth of understanding in 2017 was below the national averages for pupils at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- Safeguarding arrangements and documentation demonstrate your comprehensive approach to caring for pupils and protecting them from harm. Child protection training for all adults, including governors, takes place regularly. Adults understand and can clearly articulate their duties of care and protection. Records show that emerging issues are scrutinised and any areas of concern tackled, appropriately. You ensure that vulnerable pupils and families are signposted swiftly to external agencies where needs arise, working closely with partners to make sure needs are met. Information on the website, however, is out-of-date and does not fit with the good practices evident on the ground.
- Pupils enjoy and want to come to school. You and your leaders take suitable action where issues of attendance arise. You support and challenge families to work in partnership with you to secure good attendance for all groups of pupils. Families are encouraged to appreciate the link between good attendance and success for pupils. Consequently, overall rates of attendance in 2017 improved and are now broadly in line with national averages.
- Pupils and staff get along well together. There is a real sense of camaraderie; a positive, pleasant ethos is evident across the school. Respect between adults and pupils is palpable. Pupils display sensible, interested attitudes to their work and learning. They listen politely and respond promptly to adults' instructions and requests. Pupils say that poor behaviour and interruptions to learning are rare. They are confident that adults would deal with any issues of bullying firmly and fairly.
- Children in the Reception class enter the school with skills and abilities typical for their age. The early years environment is literacy- and numeracy-rich. Teaching and learning are good. There is a clear concentration on developing children's phonics and early reading skills, which gets them off to a good start in terms of language skills and vocabulary acquisition. Occasionally, areas of provision and learning opportunities do not present sufficient challenge for the most able

children, in writing particularly. Overall, however, children, make good progress and are well prepared for the demands of the Year 1 curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- safeguarding information on the website is brought fully up to date with school's procedures and statutory requirements
- subject leaders' action plans are sharpened to include more detail, clearer timelines and in terms of specific actions and success criteria
- the most able pupils, including those in the early years, are challenged consistently in their written work.

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

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders. I also met with a representative from the local authority and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with parents at the school gate. There were no free-text responses from parents and too few parental responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to view. Sixteen pupils responded to the pupil survey. I talked with pupils and listened to them read during lessons. I examined pupils' work and evaluated recent information about the progress of pupils. I talked with staff informally and considered the eight staff responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I considered a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and records regarding behaviour and safety.