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Mr Andrew James
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Dear Mr James

Short inspection of St Aidan's Roman Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 2019, 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This school continues to be a place where pupils are happy and safe. Pupils are nurtured and supported very well to reach their full potential both academically and personally. Your thoughtful and reasoned approach sets a tone where staff always try to provide the very best for pupils. Great store is set by using important messages from the very latest educational research, as well as observing best practice in other schools across the region. This underpins innovative and effective improvements to teaching and learning. Senior leaders' and teachers' own inquisitiveness and desire to be the very best is infectious. Pupils mirror these attitudes to learning and are intrinsically motivated to succeed.

You have worked hard and been successful in developing a committed and passionate team of staff. There is a tangible sense of purpose, energy and uncompromising ambition to see pupils flourish. Teamwork and collegiality are the hallmarks of all staff in the school. Staff speak clearly about the school being the heartbeat of the wider community. Relationships in school are strong and are underpinned by high levels of trust. As a result, teachers feel comfortable to challenge each other, celebrate success or analyse why some aspects of teaching has not worked well. Professional discussions to understand learning are the norm, and the foundation to teaching and learning in school. A culture of openness and trust is the norm.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that pupils'

achievement was raised further, especially in writing for all pupils and in mathematics for key stage 1 pupils. You have addressed any weaknesses in the quality of teaching. New systems and approaches have been introduced. The ways in which writing and mathematics are planned and taught are significantly improved. As a result, stronger progress made by current pupils is clearly seen in school assessment information. These improvements are not seen in published data. Pupils display excellent attitudes to their work. Written work in pupils' exercise books shows rapidly improving writing skills. Pupils are able to sequence and build stories by telling them aloud. Although some pupils take care with their handwriting and presentation, not all pupils are able to consistently write neatly and legibly. Expectations of teachers in this respect are not uniformly high enough.

The school is currently reviewing its approach to the design and planning of the wider curriculum. Its aim is to develop new and exciting systems to ensure a purposeful and relevant approach to teaching the curriculum that meets the specific needs of the pupils in school. Using the best information from successful schools and educational research, leaders and teachers are developing key principles that underpin St Aidan's curriculum. These include the use of and exposure of pupils to a rich and wide-ranging vocabulary, and the use of local resources and places. Subject leaders discussed with me the ongoing and continual cycle of honest and frank review of current approaches. A meticulous approach to teaching and learning is designed to ensure that pupils make strong progress in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding systems, procedures and policies are effective. The school site is secure and signing-in procedures are efficient. The school's checks on adults working in school are accurate and contain all relevant information. Records are diligently maintained and reviewed by the school's office manager. This reflects the school's determination to ensure that all pupils are safe. The designated safeguarding governor told me about checks he makes on safeguarding systems. He is aware of outcomes from the annual safeguarding audit and meets with staff regularly. As the designated safeguarding leader, you fulfil the role with responsibility and attention to detail. This ensures that the school's approach to safeguarding is meticulous.

The culture of keeping pupils safe is evident. Pupils told me that no bullying happens at school at any time. They have a good understanding of the causes of bullying and its different forms. Pupils' behaviour is good. They know how to stay safe out of school and are clear about e-safety. Pupils have full trust in their teachers and teaching assistants who look after them. Pupils' excellent caring attitudes are reflected in their role as buddies, looking after younger pupils at breaktimes, and in their desire to help others by raising money through the group 'mini vinnies'. One parent stated perceptively that the school does 'a wonderful job of helping pupils to learn in a safe and happy environment'.

Inspection findings

- There is no doubt that the school is very committed to the well-being and safety of all its pupils. I read many positive comments from parents and carers during the inspection. For example, one stated that their child 'thrives in the caring and compassionate environment the school provides'. Following my visit, I concur with this view. Pupils are settled, confident and very motivated to learn. Pupils told me that if they have a worry or concern, they are more than happy to talk to you, their teacher or the school counsellor. The school's commitment to enhancing pupils' emotional well-being is seen through investment in a counselling service. Expert support and advice is available for pupils and families. Systems to keep pupils safe are thorough and meticulous. The school resonates with a sense of purpose, yet has an ethos of calm and care.
- Children in the early years and in Year 1 are now reaching their full potential. Staff are skilled in their role in children's learning. Children are inspired to do their very best, and are engaged in the thrill of exploring, discovering and finding out new things. During the inspection, children in the Nursery carefully counted to 20, matching one object to one other object. Children are challenged and expectations are high. Some Nursery children now write independently, usually linked to one of 10 familiar stories which are repeated over and over again. Writing skills are further enhanced in the Reception class. During the inspection, children were writing instructions for planting a bean, following the familiar story of 'Jasper's Beanstalk'. Large 'floor books' capture pupils' progress in mathematics. Teachers carefully analyse examples of children who are exceeding expectations and use what they know about children's misconceptions to plan further activities to best meet their learning needs. Provision in the early years is strong.
- Under the skilled leadership of the mathematics leader, new strategies and approaches to teaching in this subject are taking root. During the inspection, evidence was seen how pupils in Year 1 independently represented number sentences using materials, equations and pictures. Pupils' attitudes to learning were exemplary. They listen attentively and respond to questions in a measured and rehearsed way. This allows them to process key information by using part of the question in their verbal answer.
- Analysis of detailed school assessment information shows that standards are rising quickly across the school. Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 remains above average. Evidence from work seen in pupils' books and from school data substantiates your view that pupils are making strong progress in every year group in school, including in key stage 1. The proportion of pupils who are working at a greater depth in their learning in reading, writing and mathematics has risen considerably since last year. This includes the most able pupils, as well as a number of pupils whose previous attainment was average. The positive effect of ongoing changes, new ideas and systems on pupils' learning is clear. We agreed that these improvements need to continue.
- Subject leaders recognise the need to be frank and honest to secure an accurate picture of provision in all subjects. The school's aim to ensure richness, breadth and balance in a curriculum that fosters wide-ranging vocabulary and develops pupils' awareness of truth is currently a core focus. You have invested in

providing time for leaders to collate examples of pupils' work, scrutinise lesson plans and undertake short visits to selected lessons. There have already been considerable successes in teaching creative and foundation subjects through real and relevant learning opportunities. These have included performing the play 'Julius Caesar' at the Shakespeare Festival, participating in a local community project and developing understanding of enterprise through a project with a local bank. You recognise that further work needs to be done to embed and build upon findings from the initial audit so that pupils can acquire age-appropriate skills and knowledge in subjects beyond English and mathematics as they move through school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils continue to make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics, including the most able pupils
- your extensive and ongoing review of the curriculum results in pupils making strong progress in subjects beyond English and mathematics
- teachers share equally high expectations of the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation.

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 North Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and three subject leaders. I held a meeting with a group of seven governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with the school's office manager and held a telephone conversation with the school's improvement adviser. Alongside you, I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and considered a range of documents relating to safeguarding. I examined the school improvement plan and the school's evaluation of its own performance. I scrutinised records of the evaluation of teaching and learning and of current pupils' progress and attainment. I analysed the published data of statutory assessments for 2016, 2017 and 2018. I reviewed the 42 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 41 free-text responses from parents and the

eight responses to the staff questionnaire. In addition, I scrutinised the school's website.