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Mrs Julia Rea
Headteacher
St John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Cowpen Lane
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Dear Mrs Rea

Short inspection of St John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have successfully maintained the welcoming and caring atmosphere where gospel values underpin all aspects of your work. Your determination has ensured that the quality of teaching is good, resulting in an improvement in standards and progress over time. This has been in the face of adversity at times, when staffing turbulence and tragedy have been handled with the utmost sensitivity and consideration.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the use of assessment systems to ensure that pupils made more progress. This has been tackled with resolve. Leaders regularly review how successful these systems are and amend them when necessary. For example, the way pupils are assessed in writing has been remodelled this academic year to ensure that a broader range of evidence can be gathered to aid teachers in planning for pupils' next steps.

You have a very clear view about the benefits of team working to develop your staff members. You provide regular opportunities for staff to refine their skills by working with others who demonstrate good practice. As a result, continual improvements are made to increase the quality and consistency of teaching. You recognise that this needs to be developed further by linking your school development plan to your leaders' monitoring and evaluation activities.

Pupils told me just how much they enjoyed coming to school and this view supports my inspection findings; I witnessed happy, smiling and friendly faces at every corner I turned. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills throughout the wider curriculum. Year 6 pupils demonstrated a real empathy when writing as though they were refugees from Afghanistan. Furthermore, pupils enjoy raising vital funds for causes which are close to their hearts. Pupils spoke passionately about their colouring club which is raising funds for Bloodrun Emergency Volunteer Service in Cleveland. They articulated clearly why this was so important; their understanding and compassion highlighted their levels of maturity.

Since becoming part of a multi-academy trust, the functions of the governing body have changed and it is in a period of flux. The current local governing body do not demonstrate the vital skills necessary to hold leaders to account effectively. You are confident that the expertise from the other governing bodies will aid you when auditing how to improve the governance in your school. The multi-academy trust board is currently overseeing this development. In addition, you are working with the other key stakeholders in the trust to develop the 'Raising Achievement Partnership'. You have shared your evaluation of the school through this forum and have identified areas for improvement. You are confident that you will be able to draw upon the necessary expertise to support your plans to ensure that most-able pupils make rapid progress across all subjects in the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Suitable and thorough checks are carried out to ensure that personnel are safe to work with children.

You regularly give safeguarding updates to all members of staff to make sure that they are all current in their thinking and practice. You have clear systems in place to record any concerns about pupils, and refer to the appropriate authority when it is necessary to do so. You, as designated lead, have strong links with external agencies and this supports the work you do to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- Overall, outcomes for pupils across the school are good. Pupils make good progress in key stage 1 to reach the standards they are expected to be at, and there is a similar picture in key stage 2. More pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined in comparison to other pupils nationally. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards was also above the national average.
- Outcomes in the early years have improved rapidly over time, resulting in the proportion of children attaining a good level of development now being in line with the national picture. Enhancement in both the indoor and outdoor provision, along with leaders working relentlessly to strengthen partnerships with parents, is ensuring that improvements in outcomes are continuing.

- Concerns about the attainment or progress of specific groups of pupils are identified quickly and dealt with effectively. For example, not enough disadvantaged pupils attained national expectations in the phonics check in Year 1 in 2016. As a result, refined phonics teaching for those pupils in Year 2 was quickly established.
- You ensure that the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is well spent. The amount of progress that disadvantaged pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics across most year groups is similar to all other pupils.
- In 2016, more pupils than others nationally achieved the higher levels in mathematics. In addition, a larger proportion of pupils secured greater depth in writing than others nationally. However, those pupils identified as being most able are not making rapid enough progress in writing and mathematics across most year groups. This is because some of the activities they are asked to carry out are not challenging enough.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and this reflects in their good attendance. A very small minority of pupils do not attend as regularly as they should, and you have very robust systems in place to tackle this. Support for families, individual and tailored to meet their needs, is provided through an independent education welfare officer. This often results in improved attendance from those pupils. However, when necessary, you do not shy away from following legal procedures in conjunction with the local authority.
- There has been a period of significant staffing turbulence since the last inspection. This has been handled well by you, and you now have a secure leadership team in place to support you in your role. Support for inexperienced leaders is a high priority of yours and you are clear about how you are managing this. Becoming part of the trust is giving you more resources to carry out this key priority. Furthermore, plans to address weaknesses in the effectiveness of the local governing body are well underway with the help of more experienced board members.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- most-able pupils are being challenged and stretched during lessons
- systems are in place for governors to become more challenging so that they can hold you and other leaders to account more robustly
- actions for school improvement are sharpened, and link closely to your and other leaders' monitoring and evaluation activities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the multi-academy trust board, the chair of the local 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 Stockton-on-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Lithgow
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The key areas I considered during this short inspection were the progress that disadvantaged pupils are making, the provision for most-able pupils, and the attendance of different groups of pupils.

During this inspection I met with you to discuss the effectiveness of the school and its leadership and management. We jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in classes across the school. I scrutinised work in pupils' books to consider the progress being made by pupils currently in school. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your school improvement plans. I met with two governors, including the chair of the local governing body. I also held a telephone discussion with a representative from the diocese and spoke to groups of pupils. I met with parents and although there were not enough responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, I took account of the responses that parents offered by free text. No staff or pupils responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire.