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Mrs Laura Fallon
Headteacher
St Bernadette's Roman Catholic Primary School Aided
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Dear Mrs Fallon

Short inspection of St Bernadette's Roman Catholic Primary School Aided

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 and improved the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2015, you have accurately identified the right priorities and put effective plans in place to drive the school forward. Together with the staff and governors, you have created a clear vision for the school. Improved training and development opportunities have revitalised the staff and improved the quality of teaching. Members of staff told me their morale is high and they feel both supported and challenged by you and other members of the leadership team. There is a sense of ambition and belief that the changes being made to teaching are having a positive impact on pupils' learning.

In the last inspection you were asked to improve standards in writing, as they lagged behind those being attained in reading and mathematics at the time. Since then, standards in writing have improved considerably. A programme introduced a year ago to develop pupils' writing skills is now reaping rewards. Teachers feel positive about the new strategies introduced. The checks I made on pupils' books showed pupils have made rapid gains across the year. Pupils are quickly developing their use of vocabulary to add colour and drama to their work. Standards of grammar, punctuation and spelling are also improving rapidly. Most pupils take great care with their handwriting and strive to achieve the highest standards of presentation. However, while the quality of writing in English books has improved, expectations for writing in other subjects need to be raised further. In subjects such as science or history, teachers do not, as yet, consistently apply the same rigorous

expectations and the quality of some work reflects this.

In response to some complaints received by Ofsted, I looked closely at the leadership and management of behaviour and special educational needs in the school. I found no evidence to substantiate allegations made in the complaints. Members of staff and pupils have complete confidence in the school's behaviour and special educational needs policies and how they are implemented. Pupils respond positively to rewards and sanctions and the high expectations held by members of staff. Relationships between adults and pupils are warm and friendly. Lessons are productive and pupils are very polite, respectful and tolerant of one another. Incidents of bullying are rare. On the few occasions when behaviour falls below expectations, leaders take effective action and keep thorough records, involving parents in the resolution. This is a happy and harmonious school community. Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and those that I spoke to in person also expressed real confidence in leaders, describing standards of behaviour as 'excellent'. The high level of attendance, well above that seen nationally in primary schools, is a further indication of the confidence of the community.

Safeguarding is effective.

You make rigorous checks on the suitability of all members of staff and other adults who visit the school. You also ensure all members of staff receive regular and robust training on safeguarding, in line with the most recent government guidance. Your weekly briefings also keep staff well informed and vigilant for any signs a child might be vulnerable or in need of additional care. When concerns are identified, you act swiftly and doggedly pursue the best outcome for the child. You are prepared to challenge external partners when you think more needs to be done. You ensure records are detailed and of high quality.

Governors have strong systems in place to check the quality of safeguarding arrangements. They audit the school's procedures annually and ensure safeguarding is discussed at every meeting of the children, families and community committee. Governors also survey and hold discussions with pupils regularly to gain their insight. As a result, governors have introduced new policies to strengthen the code of conduct, guidelines on the use of mobile phones and the guidance provided on e-safety. The high profile given to safeguarding ensures that a culture of vigilance and care pervades the school.

Inspection findings

- This is an improving school. Your motivational leadership is empowering members of staff and raising expectations. The changes you have made to the staffing structure and organisation of classes have been thoughtfully considered and are ultimately benefiting pupils. Furthermore, the constant promotion of Catholic and British values in assemblies, liturgies and evident in displays around the school is creating a strong sense of community.
- Standards of attainment are rising as a result of improvements made to the

quality of teaching. Last year, levels of attainment at the end of key stage 2 were well above the national average. Pupils made good progress, especially in mathematics, where they made significantly better progress than seen nationally. More than three quarters of pupils attained the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Provisional results for 2017 show further improvements have been achieved, with a higher proportion of pupils attaining both the expected and the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In the lessons we visited, we saw purposeful learning taking place and pupils wrestling with challenging problems that made them think deeply. Just occasionally we saw the pace of learning falter and pupils not moved on when they were ready for more.

- Provisional assessments for the end of key stage 1 also show an improving picture. Improvements are strongest in reading and writing. Pupils make a good start and attain above-average outcomes in the Year 1 national phonics screening check. Teachers build on this good foundation effectively through consistent approaches to the teaching of reading and the impact of the new writing programme. Large sheets of pupils' writing work adorn the walls of every classroom and provide a rich resource to inspire pupils' finished pieces. As a result of effective teaching, more pupils are making accelerated progress and attaining the higher standard at the end of Year 2. Those pupils who need additional help with reading are heard to read regularly and most develop as fluent readers by the time they enter key stage 2. The most able readers have some suitably challenging books to choose from and more books have recently been purchased for the newly developed library area.
- Provisional assessments show gaps in the progress and attainment of different groups of pupils are narrowing sharply. Disadvantaged pupils are doing better, as a result of the well-targeted in-class support they receive from capable teaching assistants. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also receive good support. Partnerships with parents are strong and help to shape the nature of support each child receives. In the lesson visits I made with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) it was clear teachers and teaching assistants employed well-considered strategies and adapted the work they provided to meet individual needs. The school's assessment information shows these pupils make strong progress from their different starting points.
- I looked closely at the quality of provision in the early years, as outcomes at the end of the Reception Year have, in recent years, been below the national average. This was despite most children entering the school with skills at the level expected for their age. Clearly, you were fully aware that improvements were needed. You have reorganised the Nursery and Reception classes and changed some staffing, including the leadership of the now more coherent early years unit. Good support has been provided by the local authority and new furniture, play equipment and resources have been purchased to develop both the indoor and the outdoor spaces. Parents are very pleased with the level of information they now receive and the stronger partnership approach that early years staff now foster. Provisional assessment information for this year shows outcomes have risen to be in line with those seen nationally. Nevertheless, the quality of provision needs to be strengthened further to ensure all children make

strong progress and secure a good grasp of basic reading, writing and number skills by the time they start more formal education in Year 1.

- Governors provide you with strong support. They have a good understanding of how well the school is performing and know where to focus their challenge. They make regular visits to check first-hand the impact of leaders' work and systematically gather the views of pupils and parents to inform their decisions. They open the school up to external scrutiny in order to validate your own evaluations. For example, they recently commissioned a review of the early years unit and of the school's use of the pupil premium. Both reviews recognised considerable strengths and noted the progress made in strengthening the quality of provision. Governors also manage the performance of teachers and teaching assistants robustly and ensure the objectives set for members of staff are sharply focused on pupils' progress and improving the quality of teaching.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children make rapid progress from their different starting points across the Nursery and Reception Years and, in particular, secure a firm foundation in reading, writing and number skills
- the quality of writing is consistently strong across a broad range of subjects
- teachers routinely check pupils' levels of understanding during lessons and move on quickly when pupils are ready to do so.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and the director of children's services for North Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, the early years leader, the special educational needs coordinator and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together we visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the impact of your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' work with the key stage 1 leader in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made across the year. I also walked around the school to look at the general standard of behaviour and the security of the site. I met with a group

of parents and looked at the 196 responses to Parent View. I also considered the 29 responses to the staff survey and 25 responses to the pupil survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, records of behaviour incidents and information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1. I also looked closely at standards of behaviour in the school, the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.