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31 March 2016

Mrs Denise Cushlow
Headteacher
St John Boste Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Castle Road
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Dear Mrs Cushlow

Short inspection of St John Boste Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 March 2016, 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You are highly committed to ensuring that all pupils are encouraged to do their best. You set high standards of what you expect pupils to achieve and how you expect them to behave. Parents who responded to the questionnaire have positive views of the school. Their responses included, 'What makes this school so special is that each individual child, their happiness and development are so clearly at its core' and, 'I love this school. It has a community feel. Everyone is respectful and caring to each other and children feel like part of a close knit family.' The strong focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development equips them effectively to understand their responsibilities towards others and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

You, your leaders and governors have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The quality of writing seen in pupils' books has improved. Pupils I spoke to say they enjoy their writing and they take pride in their work. They talked about how their writing targets help them to improve. There are many more opportunities for pupils to write at length and the high expectations of writing are equally reflected in their topic, science and religious education books as well as in their English books. Pupils have a good understanding

of how to improve their work from teachers' effective marking and feedback, which is in line with the school's policy. Teachers are now using pupils' progress information more effectively to identify appropriate 'next steps' for pupils in their learning.

You and your leaders check regularly that pupils are making the progress they should. Any pupils who are not achieving as well as they can are given additional support and targeted work to help them improve. You are also working hard to ensure that assessments of pupils' achievement are accurate. All staff benefit from regular meetings with staff from two other schools where pupils' work can be moderated and good practice can be shared.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust and fit for purpose. All staff have received appropriate training, including designated safeguarding leaders and governors. Highly effective procedures are in place to ensure that prompt action is taken to protect children, should it be necessary. You recently organised an external audit to ensure that all systems and procedures are effective in respect of safeguarding and health and safety. The very few recommendations made were addressed quickly. Leaders ensure that all records are detailed and comprehensive.

Pupils I spoke to during the inspection confirmed that they feel safe. They indicated that they have taken part in water, fire and road safety training as well as learning how to ride their bicycles safely. Pupils are adamant there is no bullying and indicated that they are working hard towards achieving the gold anti-bullying award. They are acutely aware of how to keep themselves safe when using computers and social media. All parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated that their child feels safe and is well-looked-after at this school. This was also reflected in the school's own survey of parental views.

Inspection findings

- Your dedicated and committed leadership is effective and has led to improvements in the school. Accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance and in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and action taken promptly to address concerns has led to improved pupils' outcomes. For example, a higher proportion of children in the early years reach a good level of development than in previous years. Standards have risen year-on-year in the Year 1 phonics check, with all pupils achieving the expected standard in 2015. Pupils' work, and the school's performance information, show that pupils are making good progress from their starting points. In 2015, pupils attained standards that were above national expectations by the end of Year 6. Subject and other leaders are keen and enthusiastic to support improvements in the school. However, not all leaders are able to fully evaluate and articulate the impact of their work on pupils' development and outcomes.
- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and areas to be

improved in the school. They take their statutory duties seriously. Leaders work collaboratively with those from two other schools to share good practice. This 'triad' enables governors to attend training and share expertise with the other governing bodies. It is clear from the minutes of governing body meetings and the headteacher 'challenge' meetings that governors ask pertinent questions of leaders and hold them to account fully for their work.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving as shown in pupils' work, the school's performance information and in leaders' records on the quality of teaching. Teachers ask probing questions to make sure that pupils understand their learning. This was very evident when pupils in Year 6 responded very effectively, demonstrating their full understanding of how to use a wide variety of features in their writing. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use assessment well to check pupils' understanding and move them on in their learning. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and have appropriate skills to support pupils well, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs, enabling them to make similar progress to their peers.
- You, and other leaders, have revised the curriculum and it is now more exciting and interesting. Pupils I spoke to indicated that they thoroughly enjoy their topic work. They are able to identify at the beginning of a topic what they would like to learn and they enjoy carrying out research in order to learn more. They benefit greatly from visits to places of interest, such as Arbeia Roman Fort, where the experience stimulates their imaginations and enthralls them to write.
- Pupils enjoy participating in experiments in science, such as when learning about how to look after their teeth and discovering the adverse effects of having sugary drinks or when making the 'giant's toothpaste', it 'exploded' from the tube.
- In mathematics, pupils learn their times tables well and rapidly develop their skills in mental arithmetic and calculation. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to deepen and apply their understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Children in the Reception Year make a good start to their education. They quickly settle and take advantage of the good range of activities provided for them. Children are thoroughly enjoying their work on space and when writing letters to the aliens in 'alien language', while using their phonics sounds effectively. Children are supported to develop their early writing and numeracy skills well. They are able to retell familiar tales, but with a twist, through using story boards effectively.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are strong. Pupils are extremely polite and very well behaved. Pupils thrive in the warm, friendly atmosphere where they know their opinions are welcomed and valued. They show great empathy towards others and relish the opportunity to engage in fundraising events to support those who are less fortunate than themselves. They are developing their understanding of modern British values through learning about other religions, such as Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity, and welcoming visitors into school who can teach them about democracy, such as the local mayor.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject and other leaders can demonstrate clearly the impact of their work on improving outcomes for pupils
- teachers enable pupils to deepen their understanding of concepts in mathematics.

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 Sunderland City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short, one day inspection I met with you, other leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. We conducted joint observations of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I evaluated information in relation to pupils' progress and looked at samples of pupils' work. I spoke to pupils informally in lessons and also met formally with a group of pupils. I scrutinised a range of documents including minutes of governing body meetings, school improvement plans, the school's own self-evaluation, records of your monitoring of the quality of teaching, and information relating to safeguarding (protecting children and keeping them safe). I considered the views expressed in the online questionnaire, Parent View, and also those in the school's own survey of parental views. I also considered the three responses to the staff questionnaire. Only one pupil questionnaire was completed as part of this inspection.