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Mrs Ann Blakey  
Headteacher  
St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Blakey

### **Short inspection of St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 2018 with Deborah Ashcroft, Ofsted Inspector, 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 October 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

You, senior leaders and governors talk passionately about the school as a family. The Catholic ethos and values underpin all that you do. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about your school. They appreciate regular communication and describe staff as caring and approachable. One parent summed this up as 'children-focused'. Pupils enjoy coming to your school because of the number of educational and residential visits that you offer. They too share a sense of belonging within the school family and welcome the additional roles and responsibilities that you provide for them. For example, Year 6 buddies support the transition of Reception children into school.

The previous inspection report challenged you to provide pupils with more opportunities to develop and practise their basic mathematical and problem-solving skills, and apply these in other subjects. You took this recommendation seriously and the school has adopted a new commercial mathematics scheme. Teachers have visited another school to observe mathematics teaching and believe this new teaching resource has improved their teaching of mathematics across the curriculum. A strong emphasis has been placed on the teaching of basic mathematical skills and this is embedded in daily practice throughout school. However, evidence gathered from pupils' workbooks and short visits to lessons

shows that while children start each lesson with mathematical fluency activities, they often do not progress on to reasoning or problem-solving learning activities.

Governance was also identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Since the previous inspection, your governing body has been strengthened by a number of new appointments. Your governors are diligent in their roles and responsibilities. They are reflective and seek to continually improve their own practice. For example, governors have instigated the Governors' Quality Mark Accreditation. Your chair of governors has a wealth of experience in education and school improvement and is, therefore, knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for development.

At the end of key stages 1 and 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has been above the national average year after year, with a high proportion exceeding the national standard. Improvement in pupils' progress and attainment has been greatest in writing. In 2018, 98% of pupils achieved the national standard and 50% of pupils exceeded this, working at a greater depth. Your deputy headteacher, with responsibility for English, has a clear vision for the subject and has led improvements in writing over the past three years. A programme of coaching and support from the local authority has improved teachers' subject knowledge. Teachers use high-quality texts to engage the children and teach writing skills in a meaningful context.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and other leaders ensure that the arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective and fit for purpose. Appropriate, rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults to work with children. Staff receive the training that they need on child protection and safeguarding issues. Safeguarding records are meticulous and show that referrals are made and followed appropriately and in a timely manner.

Pupils stated that bullying is not a problem in the school and they are proud to belong to the ABC (anti-bullying community) group. The curriculum supports pupils to stay safe. For example, Year 5 pupils visited an interactive safety centre to learn about how to prevent danger and live safely. Children know how to stay safe online and what to do if they have any worries.

Behaviour is a strength of the school. Pupils are polite and talk confidently to visitors. There have been no exclusions of pupils from school reported in recent years.

### **Inspection findings**

- I was interested to explore what leaders are doing to improve outcomes for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics. The school has prioritised the development of mathematics since the previous inspection. With a focus on high-quality teaching for all, there is a more consistent approach to

teaching across the school. Pupils' learning is supported with the use of practical apparatus to add, subtract, multiply and divide. They progress to using pictorial representations of the object, and then abstract symbols. For example, Year 1 pupils could use cubes to demonstrate adding two single digit numbers before writing the number sentence. You and your deputy headteacher track pupils' progress termly to swiftly identify pupils at risk of not attaining the national standard. You have a keen eye on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and are knowledgeable about individual pupils' barriers to learning and plan actions to address these issues.

- Your school improvement plan has correctly identified the need to develop reasoning and problem solving throughout the mathematics curriculum. Pupils' workbooks show an overemphasis on mathematical fluency, with limited opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge to problem solving and develop their reasoning skills. Teachers do not consistently pitch learning tasks appropriately to ensure progress for all groups of pupils. Therefore, not all pupils securely master the mathematics curriculum at each stage of learning.
- Basic mathematical skills are taught consistently throughout the school. Pupils know their times tables. For example, some Year 6 pupils could use their knowledge of multiplication to quickly calculate an equivalent fraction. Pupils in Year 6 are confident using relevant mathematical vocabulary, such as numerator, denominator and improper fraction. However, opportunities for pupils to develop mathematical skills in other areas of the curriculum, such as science and the humanities subjects, remain too infrequent in the pupils' workbooks observed.
- Governors closely evaluate your and other leaders' findings of the quality of education in the school. The introduction of a new challenge committee in June 2017 has formalised this process. Governors meet with yourself and senior leaders half termly to scrutinise pupils' assessment information. They have insightful knowledge of the progress of pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Minutes of governors' meetings demonstrate where you have been challenged around the performance of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics, and the detailed case studies that you have provided for them to consider.
- Governors are knowledgeable of the school's improvement priorities. Link governors meet regularly with core subject leaders to review pupils' progress. They visit the school and participate in various activities so that they are aware of standards in the school. Their role is strengthened by high-quality professional development provided by the local authority and attendance at regional conferences.
- Pupils' writing skills are a strength of the school. You requested support from the local authority to develop approaches to support children's emergent writing in the early years. This training has had a positive effect and the children are now better prepared to access the demands of the Year 1 curriculum. Pupils' workbooks show that pupils are writing at an appropriate level for their age by the end of key stage 1. Pupils' progress accelerates in key stage 2. By Year 6, middle- and higher-ability pupils are writing at length, spelling accurately, and using a wide variety of sentence types and choosing appropriate vocabulary and

punctuation for effect. Pupils capture the correct style linked to the genre of writing and they are beginning to show a writer's flair. Your teachers are skilled at using powerful hooks to engage pupils in their learning. For example, a media clip of an advertisement was used in Year 5 for pupils to capture the atmosphere of a scene to write their own suspense story. The quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation is consistently good.

- Your leaders engage in regular moderation activities to ensure that teachers' assessment of writing is accurate. For example, these activities include the local authority moderation of writing at key stages 1 and 2, moderation undertaken with neighbouring Catholic schools and termly school-based internal moderation. Teachers use the end of key stage frameworks to measure pupils' attainment against the national expected and higher standards.
- High-quality writing is evident in pupils' religious education (RE) books, but this is not maintained in other subjects, apart from English.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics
- teachers use pupil assessment information, and their knowledge of individual pupils, to pitch learning tasks appropriately to make sure that all groups of pupils are challenged high enough in mathematics
- pupils are given the opportunity to demonstrate their writing ability across a wide range of subjects.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andy Jones  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and the mathematics leader. We carried out short visits to lessons in the early years and in key stages 1 and 2. Together with a senior leader, I completed a whole-school book scrutiny in mathematics. A further whole-school book scrutiny was undertaken in English, RE and foundation subjects to focus specifically on pupils' writing. I met with a representative from the local authority and met six governors, including your chair of governors. We took into account

school documentation, including monitoring records, self-evaluation and school improvement planning, pupils' assessment information, and policies and information posted on the school's website. We listened to six pupils read and spoke with pupils from all key stages. We spoke with 12 parents and considered the 64 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We met with two teachers and two teaching assistants.