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Mrs Katharine Whitehead
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Richmond
Cross Lanes
Richmond
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Dear Mrs Whitehead

Short inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Richmond

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your promotion to headteacher in September 2016, you have shown a resolute determination to improve the school. You quickly and accurately identified that aspects of the school had declined since the previous inspection and that pupils, especially the disadvantaged, had not made a good enough start at the school. Having fallen behind, pupils only made broadly average progress across key stage 2 so that, by the time they moved on to secondary school, their level of attainment was below that seen nationally. However, together with your talented deputy headteacher, appointed in January of this year, you have forged a strong partnership, raised everyone's expectations and got the school back on track.

The governors have played a crucial role in leading these improvements. They have successfully recruited an effective leadership team and improved the quality of teaching with some other strong appointments. Their decision to release the deputy headteacher from a teaching role this year has proved invaluable: together you have been able to develop the curriculum, overhaul assessment systems, and increase the frequency and quality of checks you make on teaching. Furthermore, you have provided effective coaching and challenge for teachers who needed to 'up their game'. Governors have kept a watchful eye on the school's progress, and continue to think carefully and strategically about how recent improvements can be sustained.

Since you took up post, you have made some bold decisions and pressed forward quickly. You decided that the school's assessment system was not fit for purpose and have put in place a new, more refined model which teachers are using more confidently. You use tracking information to check, in detail, the progress made by different groups of pupils. This is helping teachers to plan more effectively and has helped you to hold teachers more tightly to account. You have also dramatically improved the mathematics curriculum and introduced new and more effective approaches to the teaching of writing. As a result, you have done much to address the areas the school was asked to improve in the last inspection. The effect of these changes is very evident in the work in pupils' books. You know that these improvements are relatively recent and must be sustained in order to improve outcomes further. You have begun to ask more of your middle leaders and have provided them with better training opportunities. Their skills are developing, but further work is required so that they can contribute more effectively to the wider leadership of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The care and well-being of pupils have a high priority in your school. You ensure that thorough checks are made when members of staff are recruited and that all adults who work in the school are well trained and understand their role in protecting children from harm. You work with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe and can assess risks they may encounter in their everyday lives.

When you are required to take steps to protect a child, you act promptly, keep detailed records and work effectively with outside agencies. Pupils feel safe in the school and told me they trust adults to help them if they have any worries.

Inspection findings

- Pupils now make a good start in the school. The quality of teaching in the Reception class has improved and all children make good progress in developing reading, writing and number skills. During our visit to the Reception class, we saw children take a keen interest in a reading activity with different adults and other children independently testing each other's reading skills as they played. Their good grasp of the sounds letters make, and their confidence in reading new words, were clear to see. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year has improved to match that seen nationally, and your current assessments indicate that you are on track to see further improvements in 2018.
- Teaching is also improving in key stage 1, although you intend to sustain the support and challenge for teachers to ensure that your new approaches to teaching are fully embedded. Pupils are making better progress and the work in their books shows rapid gains across this term. The standardised tests you have used, together with teachers' ongoing assessments, also indicate that progress for pupils currently in Year 2 has been rapid this term. Certainly the teaching of reading has become a strength of the school. This is evident in the fact that the

proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check has increased dramatically in recent years. Last year, around nine out of 10 pupils attained the expected standard, and the few who did not have progressed well in Year 2. They now read age-appropriate books confidently and fluently.

- However, weaker teaching at key stage 1 in the past means that some groups of pupils, particularly in the current Year 3 and Year 5 classes, still have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Better teaching is helping, but some pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, need more individual help if they are to get back on track.
- The changes you have made to the curriculum are having a positive effect. Pupils consistently told me that mathematics lessons have become more challenging and that they need to think more deeply now. Weekly mathematics challenges ensure that pupils develop the skills to apply their understanding of mathematics. Your teachers now check pupils' grasp of new mathematics learning on a daily basis and provide 'catch-up' help the same day for pupils who need it. The most able pupils who demonstrate a good understanding get further challenges each day, which helps them to develop a deeper understanding. The highly effective leadership of mathematics teaching has quickly raised the bar and pupils are consequently thriving now in mathematics. Last year, pupils made significantly better progress across key stage 2 in mathematics than seen nationally, with the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard being above the national average.
- Progress was also strong in reading across key stage 2. Here too, in 2017, pupils made considerably more progress than seen nationally. However, progress in writing was more average and, as a result, pupils did not make up the ground lost in key stage 1 stemming from weaker teaching in the past. Nearly half the pupils left the school without reaching the standard expected for their age. Improving the teaching of writing has therefore been a priority for you. Again, here you have been bold and replaced the previous scheme of work with new approaches. Teachers now expect pupils to write at length more often and have included many more writing opportunities across the wider curriculum. Teaching helps pupils to develop their ideas and to structure their writing effectively. Creative writing cleverly complements the work done to improve pupils' understanding of grammar and punctuation. Pupils' spelling is improving because it has been a focus in all classes this term. Spelling displays in each classroom, daily spelling homework, and the new marking policy have all raised the importance of accurate spelling.
- New and engaging topics introduced this year have re-energised the teaching of foundation subjects. Good planning, tightly linked to national curriculum expectations, now helps teachers to plan better and focus on developing subject-specific skills. You have also begun to assess pupils' progress in each national curriculum subject in order to better evaluate the quality of the curriculum you have introduced. There are good musical and sporting opportunities and over half the pupils who responded to the pupil survey said they frequently take part in after-school activities.

- The school's work to develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is strong. The promotion of faith makes a strong contribution to the ethos of the school. Relationships in school are very positive and pupils show respect for one another. During my visit, pupils were consistently polite, welcoming and courteous. A large majority of pupils and parents say that bullying is rare and that behaviour in school is managed effectively. Levels of attendance for different groups of pupils are above the national average for primary schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the role of middle leaders is further developed so that they can more effectively influence the quality of teaching and learning and accelerate pupils' progress
- rapid progress is sustained, particularly in writing, so that standards of attainment in coming years compare favourably with national averages at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2
- more additional help is provided for pupils who fall behind, especially the disadvantaged, so that they rapidly catch up with their peers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Middlesbrough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. 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 and the deputy headteacher, a group of governors, including the co-chairs of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together, you and I visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits, I scrutinised some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I met with the mathematics and English leaders and, together, we looked in detail at some pupils' work in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. You, the deputy headteacher and I also looked at pupils' topic books and walked around the school to see evidence of pupils' topic work during the open afternoon for parents and friends. I looked at the 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and took into account the 13 responses to the staff survey and the 31 responses to the pupil survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's self-

evaluation and improvement planning, policies and other information available on the school's website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school, especially in key stage 1, the quality of teaching and assessment, and the breadth and balance of the curriculum. I also looked at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.