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Mr Paul Conway
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Conway

Short inspection of St Bernadette's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 2018, 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 July 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 appointment and that of the deputy headteacher just over a year ago, together you have become a formidable team. You have set about school improvement with an infectious energy and drive, tinged with impatience to see all weaknesses eradicated. Your strong leadership has developed a sense of unity among the wider school community. Leaders, governors, teachers and teaching assistants are clearly ambitious to secure ongoing improvements for the benefit of all pupils. The school motto of 'be the best you can be' is most apt and evident in all aspects of the school's work.

Leaders have a clear overview of the strengths and the small inconsistencies that remain in teaching. As a result, a comprehensive calendar of improvement actions and monitoring activities is in place. Teamwork is the key to the school's drive for continual improvement. Staff are empowered to share their expertise and ideas, as illustrated by the 'shout out board' in the staffroom, which is used to post their ideas and comments on aspects of the school improvement plan. Curriculum leaders are skilled in mapping out the knowledge and skills required for pupils in every year group. They are effective in managing their subject areas through auditing provision and devising appropriate action plans. Current improvement actions and initiatives to further improve the quality of teaching and learning, and those planned to be implemented in the coming weeks, need to be embedded and consolidated in order to see their full effect.

You have ensured that the areas for improvement raised in the previous inspection report have largely been addressed successfully. Since your appointment, leaders have worked hard to develop a new approach to develop high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. This is encapsulated in the recent policy for teaching. This outlines the high expectations of every member of staff, and a list of 'non-negotiables' to be seen in every classroom and lesson. Teachers actively participate in termly meetings to review the attainment and progress of each pupil in their class. New assessments systems are in place, with a more detailed and rigorous system introduced this term. You engage with local primary schools to check the accuracy of the school's assessments, and teachers are increasingly skilled in using assessments to plan challenging work for pupils of all abilities. Collectively, leaders and teachers have successfully addressed inconsistencies in the teaching of writing. The school is now tackling emerging issues in the way pupils independently solve mathematical problems and develop skills in reasoning. In addition, ways to utilise the outdoor learning environment more effectively in the early years requires investigation.

The successful focus the school places on the all-round development of pupils is one of its key strengths. One parent perceptively wrote that pupils 'think of school as a second family'. Pupils benefit from an inspiring environment with stimulating displays. These cover areas such as the achievements of former pupils to raise current pupils' aspirations, or the display of school values, which encourages pupils to be proud, respectful, courageous or unique. In classrooms, displays are consistently purposeful, bright and support learning very well. Pupils' work is celebrated effectively, as seen in the range of writing displayed in school. Current initiatives, including a push developing times tables knowledge, are given a high profile. Displays provide support for each year group's current topics in mathematics and English, as well as science and history. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good. They show respect and care not just for each other, but by reaching out to the wider community through charity work and by acting as buddies and 'friendship builders' at break-times.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All policies, procedures and records are of good quality, up to date and maintained well by the school business manager. The governor responsible for safeguarding undertakes a regular check on all statutory documentation. The culture of keeping pupils safe and putting them at the heart of the inclusive, friendly school community is evident. The school promotes pupils' personal, social and emotional development very well, and pupils show high levels of respect for each other and their school. One parent accurately stated that the school is a 'safe and happy place of learning'.

Pupils categorically state that no bullying happens at school at any time and say that they feel safe. They explained to me the benefit of regular fire drills and how they practise for an emergency lockdown procedure which they called 'hide from the headteacher'. Their behaviour is excellent. They have regular teaching on bullying and e-safety, and, as a result, pupils are knowledgeable in these areas.

Pupils know the dangers of social media and were clear about the school's online 'firewall'. They have full trust in their teachers and teaching assistants, who look after them, and they report feeling safe all of the time. All parents stated in the inspection questionnaire that their child is safe at school, and everyone who responded would recommend the school to another parent.

Inspection findings

- Children get off to a good start in their learning in early years. Adults are skilled in supporting children's learning. Leaders have ensured that there are many opportunities for children to develop and practise their mark making, writing and understanding of number. Teacher-led activities both inside and outside are carefully planned to both challenge and inspire children. Children's phonics knowledge and early reading skills are developed well in the Reception class so that they are well prepared to move into Year 1. Children are keen to explore, investigate and follow their own interests during child-initiated activities in the indoor learning environment. Opportunities to independently access the outdoor learning environment are more limited.
- The school has thoroughly tackled pupils' comparatively weaker progress in writing compared to reading and mathematics. Leaders have discerningly used recent educational research as well as support and advice from local outstanding schools. This has resulted in a new approach in the teaching of writing that has quickly borne fruit. Pupils are now able to recognise key features of a particular genre of writing through analysis of a model piece of text. Additional time has been given to drafting and editing extended writing before a final, 'published' piece of work. Pupils in Year 1 were successfully ordering events in a story about a boy and a penguin by writing simple sentences. Year 2 pupils were independently retelling the story of Jack and the Beanstalk, adding their own verbs and adjectives. Analysis of assessment data in school and work seen in pupils' books confirms that pupils' attainment is rising. The quality of handwriting and presentation in pupils' books in every year group is high.
- Over time, the good progress of the most able pupils has resulted in their consistently high attainment. This has not always been the case for other groups of pupils. Teachers are aware of this discrepancy and are now more flexible in the way that they pitch work to challenge pupils of all abilities. They are more skilled at moving pupils' learning on, and ensuring that skills and knowledge are becoming embedded. Pupils of all abilities are now making good progress in almost all subjects across the curriculum.
- Evidence in pupils' books and analysis of school assessment data show that over time progress and attainment in mathematics have recently slowed. Leaders have been quick to address this emerging issue and have identified that some pupils have struggled to tackle problem-solving and reasoning activities without support from an adult. The leader of mathematics is currently introducing strategies to tackle this aspect of pupils' learning. From work seen in books, teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to tackle mathematical reasoning activities, and, consequently, pupils are beginning to develop resilience in undertaking them without adult support. Further work is still required in this area.

- Subject leaders are quite clear about their new approach to curriculum planning. Following an analytical and extensive review of the curriculum, which included taking the views of staff and pupils into account, significant changes have been put into place. This new approach ensures that pupils have access to a rich and diverse curriculum, avoiding a superficial approach. 'I can' statements are used as the basis to assess pupils' skills and knowledge across all creative and foundation subjects. This allows subject leaders to plan schemes of work in a progressive way that builds on previous learning and ensures that there are no gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in the early years have regular opportunities to explore, investigate, work and play independently in the outdoor learning environment
- pupils continue to develop their independence and resilience when undertaking mathematical reasoning and problem-solving activities
- recent and current initiatives to further develop the quality and consistency in teaching and learning are embedded.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Middlesbrough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Middlesbrough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the English, mathematics and curriculum leaders. I held a meeting with five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with the school's business manager and administrator and met with the chief executive officer of the Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust. Alongside you, I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks with the deputy headteacher. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school. I considered a range of documents relating to safeguarding. I examined the school improvement plan, the school's monitoring of its own performance and records of current pupils' progress and attainment, together with published data of statutory assessments for 2016 and 2017. I reviewed a number of comments made by parents using the free-text

facility, along with the 70 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
In addition, I scrutinised the school's website.