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Ms Lynette Brammah
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Brammah

Short inspection of St Cuthbert's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your appointment as executive headteacher in September 2016, you quickly established yourself as a strong figurehead, bringing clear purpose and direction to the school. Your energy and enthusiasm are infectious and have invigorated the wider staff team and governors, all of whom are excited about the future and keen to be part of this improving school.

You quickly established a regular and focused programme of checks on teaching and on pupils' achievement. This gives you a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your high expectations for the quality of teaching and learning mean that you tackle underperformance effectively. This ensures that all staff buy into your vision and rise to the challenges expected of them. You set precise targets for pupils' achievement in every year and they are based upon sound evaluation of pupils' prior attainment. While these targets are ambitious, they represent your high aspirations and are wholly achievable. They form the basis of your detailed improvement plans and are used effectively to hold teachers to account for their pupils' achievement. Leaders, including governors, use the plans well to evaluate regularly the impact of their work. This has ensured that the quality of teaching in the school remains good.

Subject leadership has strengthened under your guidance. All leaders have a very clear understanding of the priorities for improvement in their area of responsibility

and more widely. They lead by example and have excellent subject knowledge that they readily share with colleagues. You encourage them to be outward facing and to seek out new partnerships with other schools to strengthen practice at St Cuthbert's. Research is a strong feature of your practice and means that any new ideas to secure further improvements are based on proven good practice. As a result, subject leaders share your high aspirations and expectations for continuous improvement, which places the school in a strong position moving forward.

Trusting relationships embody the strong Christian ethos of the school, which provides the moral code for both staff and pupils. Pupils are encouraged to use their generosity of spirit in their daily lives. The oldest pupils show great maturity in being strong role models for some of the youngest pupils. For example, when I was talking to a group of pupils, some of the younger ones were very eager and excited to share their views. One of the older boys gently placed a hand on the arm of one of the younger pupils, who was excitedly talking over another. This action alone quietened the younger pupil and allowed their peer to finish speaking. Pupils say that they enjoy the wide range of activities provided for them through the well-organised and engaging curriculum and the raft of after-school activities. The pupils' health and safety committee provides a good example of the opportunities given to pupils to allow them to contribute to school life and to be responsible.

Since your appointment, you have tackled meticulously the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You provide strong guidance on the approaches to teaching you want to see. For example, you wanted pupils to have increasing opportunities to work collaboratively and to be able to talk about their learning. You also wanted both teachers and teaching assistants to encourage pupils to use more ambitious vocabulary. Both of these elements that you desired are now an established part of learning in all classes.

In addition, you introduced regular progress meetings with staff, to check on pupils' achievement. At these meetings, you examine the progress of all pupils and determine whether anyone needs additional support to get them back on track with their learning. This is strengthening pupils' outcomes across the school and your internal assessment information supports this. There remain a couple of pockets of historic underachievement in writing, of which you are already aware and for which you have interventions in place. In 2017, the provisional outcomes for key stage 2 indicate that you have made strong gains in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics, which is a marked improvement on 2016. The proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard remain broadly in line with the national averages, and you acknowledge that increasing the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard, particularly in reading and writing, is an area for further improvement. That said, pupils' outcomes remain good overall and there is a strong picture of achievement coming through in all year groups.

Children enter Nursery demonstrating skills that are typical for their age and stage of development. As a result of effective transition arrangements and strong relationships, children quickly settle into Nursery. Historically, children make good

gains in their learning from their starting points and greater proportions of children reach a good level of development by the end of Reception Year compared with national averages. However, in 2016 and 2017, this dipped slightly. While the complex needs of small numbers of children in each year group contributed to this, it is in part because fewer children achieved the standard expected in writing. This impacted upon the overall proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception. While current early years provision is good, there are still too few opportunities for mark making, particularly in free-choice activities.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and recruitment procedures follow local authority recommended principles, which ensures that all staff employed to work with children are fit to do so. Staff are trained regularly in all aspects of safeguarding and know how important it is to refer any concerns to you as the dedicated safeguarding officer. All staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe in school and you take prompt action in referring any safeguarding concerns to appropriate agencies. You have developed strong partnerships with these agencies to secure any necessary support.

Pupils speak confidently about how safe they feel in school. They have a good understanding of the risks to their safety, including online safety. Pupils take a measured approach to bullying. One pupil explained: 'There is sometimes some bullying, but teachers do all they can to sort it out and to make it easy to tell!' Pupils who responded to the online survey expressed their confidence in teachers' readiness to support them and listen to them. Such strong and trusting relationships form the bedrock of the school's success in developing pupils' strong personal and social skills effectively.

Governors undertake their responsibilities diligently by ensuring that all policies and procedures are compliant with statutory requirements. Governors demonstrate sensitivity to individual families and are careful of the information placed on their website that reflects any barriers to learning experienced by those pupils eligible for additional pupil premium funding. Governors meet regularly to ensure full health and safety assurance and use their visits to school to validate the effectiveness of such policies. They ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school.

Inspection findings

- I came to the school wanting to find out how effectively teachers were planning and delivering activities that meet the needs of pupils in mixed-age classes, particularly in writing. I also wanted to see whether teaching enabled middle-ability pupils to make good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics. Together with the subject leaders, you have already improved the quality and consistency of teachers' planning in both English and mathematics. Teachers pay careful consideration to the progression of skills identified within the age-related expectations of the national curriculum when they plan a unit of work. Wherever possible, they use wider studies to provide a meaningful context for pupils' learning. For example, younger pupils learned measuring skills in order to compare the circumference of their heads when studying 'All about me' in science. At the same time, older pupils were developing their understanding of recount, by listening to eye-witness accounts from The Blitz. This is now a consistent feature of practice across the school.
- In mathematics, you have placed a greater focus on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills and ensure that pupils, particularly middle- and lower ability pupils, can access a range of practical resources to support their learning. Provisional pupils' outcomes for 2017 show a steep rise in the proportions of pupils reaching the high standard and a marked improvement in pupils' overall average score, which is above the national figure. You are keen to maintain this improvement and strengthen further the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard, which remains broadly average.
- Your analysis of pupils' achievement in 2016 identified that pupils' use and understanding of vocabulary had prevented more pupils reaching the expected standard in writing. One of your priorities has been to extend pupils' general knowledge and extend their understanding of subject-specific vocabulary and expressive language. Whenever possible, good-quality texts provide a stimulus for pupils' writing and enable pupils to write in a range of styles. The essential skills of English grammar, spelling and punctuation are taught beforehand to good effect. This is giving pupils, particularly middle-ability pupils, a purpose for their writing and providing them with the tools to be successful writers. Occasionally, teachers do not practise the essential skills sufficiently to enable pupils to write with confidence. When this happens, pupils' outcomes in writing dip. You recognised that this is an area where you need to secure greater consistency.

- I also wanted to examine children's writing in early years. Children are encouraged to use their early phonic knowledge to attempt to sound and write words successfully. There is great emphasis placed upon developing children's spoken language as a support for writing. All staff encourage children to speak in complete sentences and use effective questioning to encourage and support children to find the best words to express their feelings and thoughts accurately. While teacher-led activities are developing children's early writing skills successfully, there are too few opportunities for children to 'mark make' in activities they can choose for themselves both inside and in the outdoor environment. You know this to be the case and already have focused plans for improvement.
- The link between reading and writing is evident in teachers' planning and an army of volunteers listen to pupils read every week. However, an emerging priority for this year is to develop pupils' reading skills further. You have, rightly, identified that reading for pleasure and developing pupils', particularly middle-ability pupils', reading resilience need more work. This is in order that pupils are encouraged to keep going with a book when they are finding it hard or uninteresting and to challenge pupils to try increasingly sophisticated texts. You already have a detailed action plan in place to sort this relative weakness out.
- A further focus of the inspection was to examine disadvantaged pupils' achievement. The very small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school makes it difficult to assess any trends in achievement against that of other pupils nationally. Governors ensure that additional funding is used wisely to address the barriers to learning experienced by individual pupils. You have also identified a pupil premium champion in each year group to monitor closely the impact of additional support and intervention. This is ensuring that disadvantaged pupils are making equally good progress as their peers from their starting points.
- You have successfully arranged the part-time appointment of the special educational needs coordinator from your feeder high school. Although she only started in September, there is already a much sharper focus on the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She has already undertaken a detailed analysis of pupils' needs and organised provision effectively. Parents are now more actively involved in their children's learning, because of the detailed information sharing that is now commonplace. She is a fountain of knowledge and support for staff. She places great emphasis upon early identification, so that support is commissioned sooner than has previously been the case. The leadership of special educational needs provision is now very strong. Staff delivering support and interventions speak confidently about the support they provide and are already able to demonstrate the impact of their work on increasing pupils' confidence and improving pupils' progress.

- My final focus was to review the effectiveness of leadership. You have tackled the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection effectively. Through careful and regular analysis of pupils' assessment outcomes, you ensure that you have identified the right priorities for continuous improvement. You have strengthened the role of subject leaders in the school and have appointed a strong and effective leader for special educational needs. This creates a strong leadership team with much capacity for further improvement. Governors bring a range of skills and experiences to their role and ensure that any additional government funding is well spent. Together, you are looking towards the future and providing a clear direction to the school in order to continue to drive the school to be the best it can be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils, especially middle-ability pupils, achieve age-related expectations, particularly in reading and writing
- there are increasing opportunities for children in the early years to 'mark make', particularly within activities they can choose for themselves
- pupils are encouraged to read more widely for pleasure.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, 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

Diane Buckle

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the impact of actions you are taking to continue to improve the school and to discuss safeguarding arrangements. We observed learning together in all classes and talked to pupils about their learning. I also held meetings with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, and held meetings with both the local authority's and diocese's school improvement adviser. I talked to pupils in classes and around school and listened to four pupils read. I reviewed the provisional results for summer 2017 in national assessment tests of pupils in early years, Year 1, the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. I also checked the assessment information of all other year groups, and groups of pupils for the last academic year. Account was taken of the 46 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, the 12 responses from the staff survey and the 20 responses to Ofsted's parent

questionnaire, Parent View. A number of documents were scrutinised. These included a range of safeguarding documents, the school's written evaluation of its work and the school improvement plan. I also reviewed your recent headteacher's reports to governors, and minutes from recent full governing body meetings and committee meetings.