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12 February 2019

Miss Emma Jarvis
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Dear Miss Jarvis

Short inspection of Northern Saints CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 29 January 2019 with Dame Nicola Nelson, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

At Northern Saints, the leadership team has maintained and built on the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There are marked improvements in specific areas. School leaders, working hand in hand with governors, the diocese and the local authority, have ensured a resolute and determined focus on continuous improvement through a period of change in headship arrangements. The determined and resilient leadership that you, your deputies and governors provide has ensured that the school has continued to improve outcomes for pupils. It has also successfully addressed areas for improvement, which were identified in the previous inspection.

You also deliver on what you believe. Your school values are reflected in the quality of relationships between pupils and with staff. Pupils have impeccable behaviour as they walk around school. In lessons they are polite and considerate. They understand and celebrate diversity and individual differences. They also say that bullying is rare and, if it does happen, it is always dealt with effectively and fairly by staff.

Your thoughtful and planned programme of learning ensures that most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics in all key stages in the school. In addition, you have ensured that teaching and learning have improved, especially in key stage 1. In key stage 1, most pupils achieve the expected standards for their age and some exceed these standards. Disadvantaged

pupils make similar progress to other pupils nationally and their attainment has risen. Pupils now attend school more regularly and are well prepared for their next steps in education, both academically and socially.

Pupils are justly proud of their achievements and were eager to show inspectors what they can achieve. They are happy in school and have positive attitudes to their learning and lessons. Pupils respect each other's ideas and work well together to strive to do their best. They say it is a 'great place to be!'

Only three per cent of parents responded to the online questionnaire provided by Ofsted. Those that did respond gave a mixed view of the school. This was reflected in some of the conversations with a selection of other parents outside the school. The vast majority agree that their children are happy in school. You are aware of the apparent disengagement of parents and have started to roll out modifications to websites. In addition, you now have a higher presence outside the school at the beginning and end of the day.

You work with governors and an external school improvement partner to ensure that you make a sharp and timely analysis of information that informs your next steps to improve the school further. Your well-informed and knowledgeable governors are fully engaged in strategically shaping school priorities. They have robust checks in place to ensure that agreed actions are making a difference. As a result, everyone has a clarity about what and how the school can improve further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. You help ensure that a culture of safeguarding is evident and underpins the life of the school. The curriculum is responsive to emerging issues, both locally and nationally. It provides opportunities for pupils to talk about their concerns and worries and reflect on issues they come across in the wider world. Consequently, pupils are clear about how to keep themselves and others safe, including when online and in a range of other situations. They have supportive and strong relationships with staff, which pupils say make them feel safe and have faith in the adults who look after them.

You help keep safeguarding alive in people's minds through regular training and updates. This helps to make sure all staff have a keen grasp of how to keep pupils safe. You use and analyse detailed, high-quality records to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and to ensure that no lapses or inconsistencies in practice emerge. You and your governors make regular checks on the systems to ensure that the suitability and the processes of appointing staff are robust. The responsible governor has a secure working knowledge of how safeguarding is working in the school

Inspection findings

- Inspection evidence, including a review of pupils' work in books, listening to children read and watching some lessons, shows that pupils achieve well in early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 in a range of subjects. This is because the quality of teaching is consistently good and is sometimes outstanding. Actions, taken since the last inspection, have ensured that practice across key stage 1 is now more consistent. For example, the teaching of phonics is now systematically delivered, is accurate and helps pupils, including the less able, to read and write more effectively.
- Children enter the early years with a wide range of skills, abilities and starting points. Some have significant barriers to learning. By the end of Reception Year, the proportion of children reaching the standard expected for their age is improving and beginning to catch up with that seen nationally. In key stages 1 and 2, pupils often make good progress; some make accelerated progress. This is particularly the case for those who need to catch up and disadvantaged pupils. By the end of Year 6, pupils' standards of attainment and progress are consistently well above average in writing and reading. Standards in mathematics are more varied, but always at least in line with those seen nationally. Progress is not as good as it could be because, at times, some pupils who are ready to move on do not do so quickly enough in lessons. Those that could are not asked to apply their basic skills to solve more complex questions often enough.
- The school's information demonstrating current pupils' attainment and progress shows that pupils make sustained progress from a variety of starting points. This is because teachers, well supported by school leaders, build on their positive relationships with pupils to help stimulate and motivate them. Teachers respond well to pupils' individual needs and interests. Learning is purposeful, well-ordered and planned to ensure it offers engaging and exciting activities, both within school and beyond. In addition, meaningful interventions are helping those who need extra help and time to make the most of their learning.
- Leaders are astute in their evaluations of learning seen in lessons and in pupils' books. They ensure that assessments of what pupils can do are accurate. Systems to check the effectiveness of teachers' work are supported by effective monitoring systems. These systems inform professional dialogue, where emerging issues are identified. Consequently, school leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning and take rapid action to address any concerns.
- The curriculum is well planned. It has a clear intention to support pupils in building an adventurous vocabulary, secure a knowledge bank of important information and understand the skills needed to best apply these attributes. It builds on establishing a strong core of basic skills in English and mathematics. Pupils are increasingly expected to apply themselves to all subjects equally. However, this is less evident in some areas such as art and modern foreign

languages. This is because subject leaders' roles are not as well developed in all areas of the curriculum.

- The specially resourced provision in the school helps pupils make rapid and sustained progress due to some exemplary practice. Pupils from a number of schools receive a tailored support programme in a calm and supportive provision. This helps pupils to catch up with their peers. Supported by skilled and understanding adults, the vast majority catch up sufficiently to allow them to be fully reintegrated into their own schools.
- Steps to address low attendance are having an impact. The appointment of key people to focus on this work to support families and challenge non-attendance has made a positive difference. Pupils now attend more frequently and the number of children who are often absent has reduced. Attendance is now slightly better than that of similar schools, but still below that seen nationally. School leaders, including governors, are maintaining a keen focus on improving this still further.
- Governors, some from an education background, play a pivotal role in overseeing the life of the school and setting strategic priorities. They have played an important part in helping navigate the school through a period of uncertainty in leadership while ensuring that the school moves forward. Governors, supported by the diocese, help set and ensure that the culture of the school reflects its vision and aims. They make sure that safeguarding is effective and that the additional funding, for example that used for disadvantaged pupils, is used to best effect. Consequently, they know the school well and have a clear understanding of what it needs to do next to move onto the next level.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders, especially those leading art and modern foreign languages, develop their subjects so that they are taught to the same high standards seen in other subjects in the school
- teachers quickly identify when pupils are ready to apply their mathematical skills to solve more complex questions so they can work at a greater depth more often
- effective communications with parents are further developed to ensure that they feel more engaged with the life school and the learning of their children.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Durham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held discussions with governors, the acting headteacher, senior leaders, the diocese and with the local authority adviser.

Inspectors observed learning in all classrooms. Joint observations were carried out with the headteacher.

Inspectors listened to some pupils read, looked at pupils' work and held discussions with a group of pupils.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, at playtimes and in lessons.

Responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, were viewed and an inspector talked with some parents at the beginning of the school day.

In addition, inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including information about the performance of pupils and the school's self-evaluation, as well as information on the curriculum, safeguarding and other key policies.

I checked the school website to ensure it has the information that parents should have access to.