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Mrs Louise Nealings  
Headteacher  
St Charles' RC Primary School  
Regent Farm Road  
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Dear Mrs Nealings

### **Short inspection of St Charles' RC Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 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 February 2012.

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

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

Recommendations from the previous inspection challenged you to improve the consistency of teaching, develop the skills of leaders and challenge the most able pupils. Recently appointed leaders have rapidly stepped up to meet your high expectations. In 2016, the proportion of pupils reaching greater depths of learning in reading, writing and mathematics was above national averages in both key stage 1 and 2. This demonstrates that you have tackled issues robustly, supporting and challenging staff effectively to ensure that pupils make good or better progress from their different starting points. That non-negotiable 'quality first teaching in every classroom' tactic that you hold dear has paid off and continues to do so.

You lead by example and your determined, systematic approach to preserving good-quality teaching and learning throughout a period of change in terms of staffing, has, as suggested above, been successful; pupils' good outcomes in 2016 in all subjects across key stages substantiate this. You are mindful, however, that you cannot take your eye off the ball. You understand that recently appointed staff, including those leaders new to role, will continue to require your single-minded approach to improving pupil outcomes. You have correctly identified writing, particularly for boys, and the effective use of time and additional adults in the early years, as areas for further development. Writing 'hooks' that engender 'excitement

and passion' are already beginning to inspire and engage pupils who were previously reluctant to write. Shakespeare-induced writing opportunities and historical recounts through drama were favourites mentioned by a group of boys. The local authority's early years adviser, the early years governor and senior leaders are taking appropriate action to further develop and sharpen practice in the early years. The proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development has remained above the national average over time.

The large majority of parents and pupils hold positive views about the work of the school. All parents agree that children are safe, happy and well looked after. Pupils like their teachers, finding them 'gentle, kind and patient'. They thoroughly enjoy the 'fun' learning that takes place, daily. Attendance, as a result, is above national averages and a strength of the school. Parents spoke with particular appreciation of the distinctively spiritual, nurturing ethos of the school which is well-embedded. Parents also value the high visibility and ready availability of teachers and leaders. The large majority agree that staff respond promptly to any concerns they may have. Encapsulating the views of many some commented that: 'this is an excellent small school with a very personal feel'; 'there is a real sense of excitement and possibility'; 'children feel valued and listened to'. Accolades indeed.

All staff say they are proud to work at St Charles' and feel the school has improved since the previous inspection. The majority feel very well supported by leaders and are appreciative of the regular, good-quality professional development opportunities you make available. A minority would appreciate more support with managing the school's assessment systems and procedures as well as further detail about precisely how their practice could be improved. Staff are confident that pupils behave well and make good progress.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and managers hold the safety and protection of pupils at the centre of their thinking and endeavours. Staff have appropriately vigilant attitudes and understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. Regular training means governors and staff are kept up to date with the most recent guidance and legislation. Checks on the suitability of adults working with pupils are thorough and leaders follow safe recruitment practices when appointing new staff.

Pupils can explain how to keep themselves safe online and are highly aware of the risks of technology, valuing the internet blocks and filters that are in place for their protection. The secure entry and exit systems in operation contribute to pupils' feelings of being safe and well looked after. The bright, attractive environment is tidy, hazard-free and well-maintained. Pupils are appreciative of the regular sessions that inform them about ways in which they can keep themselves safe: e-safety, road safety, fire hazards and safe cycling. Staff listen to pupils; as one pupil commented, 'if you feel vulnerable you talk to a staff member you really trust and that's it, job done, problem solved'. Bullying, pupils say, happens rarely and is managed sensitively and effectively by all adults, including well-respected 'dinner nannies'.

## Inspection findings

- Historically, pupils' outcomes in key stage 1 and 2 remained broadly in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Your high expectations and determination that pupils' outcomes could and should be improved upon, however, raised the bar. In 2016, pupils' outcomes in key stage 1 and 2 were above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics at both expected and greater depth. 97% of pupils in key stage 1 and 90% in key stage 2 reached the expected standard in science, again bettering the national picture. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has been consistently high compared nationally. Current pupils continue to benefit from your precise evaluation of the skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils bring to school and your keen focus on building upon the strong foundations that the majority of pupils have; progress for all groups of pupils is good across subjects.
- The majority of children bring a broad range of existing skills to school. Early years staff work well with parents and other agencies to build upon this positive start and by the end of the Reception Year, children's outcomes are consistently above the national average. Children in the early years are well cared for and behave well. They thoroughly enjoy the wide variety of attractive resources that stimulate their curiosity indoors and outside. Relationships with early years staff are positive and enabling. Additional adults and teaching and learning time, however, are not used to maximum effect by all adults; transitions in particular can be messy and time as well as resources ill-used. Not all children in the early years are challenged to apply and practise their skills of writing regularly enough. You are aware of underlying issues and are taking appropriate action to eradicate these.
- Subject leadership, despite some instability in staffing, is strong, particularly with regard to English, science and mathematics. You afford subject leaders relevant development opportunities based on their individual needs while taking heed of the particular needs of the school. Supported and challenged by effective subject leaders, the quality of teaching across key stages is therefore strengthened. A small proportion of staff would like further support to navigate the school's assessment procedures and additional constructive feedback on further developing their practice.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use clear explanations and skilled questioning to encourage pupils to think deeply about subject matter. Pupils display positive attitudes throughout lessons and activities, listening respectfully to teachers and their peers. The real enjoyment and passion for learning that exist result in a warm, productive environment.
- The leadership team, including governors, make sure that the extra funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is spent wisely. Particular needs are carefully considered in discussions with parents, pupils and external specialists. Barriers to learning are identified precisely and good-quality teaching meets the needs of most pupils successfully. Where required, tailored interventions are put in place and strategies help individuals and small groups of pupils to make good progress. Several parents commented positively about the

support received by their child, feeling that confidence as well as ability improved due to the school's actions.

- Senior leaders and governors use the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their different starting points. In 2016, for example, disadvantaged pupils in the early years and in both key stage 1 and 2 performed as well or better than other pupils nationally in all subjects.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, particularly boys and those in the early years, have increased opportunities to write at length
- time and additional adults are used effectively and in a consistently productive manner in the early years
- staff, including recently appointed subject leaders, receive precise, constructive feedback that supports and challenges them to improve their practice, regularly
- you continue to support staff to use the school's agreed assessment systems successfully.

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 Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and managers. I also met with a representative from the local authority, a group of pupils and six governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke with parents at the school gate and took account of 45 free text opinions as well as 69 parental responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I talked with pupils and staff informally during breaks and in lessons and considered the 20 staff responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. 19 pupils responded to the pupil survey. I examined pupils' work and evaluated recent information about the progress of pupils. I considered a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and records regarding behaviour and safety. During this inspection, I paid particular attention to boys' writing, the quality of teaching in key stage 2, subject leadership and attendance.