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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Gavin Johnston
Headteacher
St Michael's Church of England Primary School
Howling Lane
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 1DJ

Dear Mr Johnston

Short inspection of St Michael'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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have developed further the safe and secure learning environment in which pupils, as your school motto states, enjoy 'Learning to Love – Loving to Learn'.

Your pupils are a credit to the school. They are welcoming, polite and respectful. Pupils enter into conversations with trusted adults maturely. For example, one identified that following the change of designation from a first school to a primary school, the playground is a little on the small side and there is insufficient play equipment for two additional classes of pupils. This was a reasoned and astute observation from a key stage 2 pupil.

Leaders have managed the transition from a first school to a primary school well, while ensuring that standards continue to rise. The current, and first, Year 6 cohort of pupils have risen to the challenge of being the oldest pupils in school for the third year running. They are wonderful role models for the younger pupils in school.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about you, your staff and the school as a whole. One described the school as, 'a great school with a fabulous ethos', while another said, 'a lovely school, where every child counts'.

You analyse the school's assessment information accurately, identify areas for development rapidly and lead improvements confidently. A telling example is the sizeable improvement in the proportion of pupils who reach the standard in the Year 1 check of

phonic knowledge and skills, from below average in 2015 to well above average in 2017. This was an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection.

You acknowledge that the school's provision for a small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities together with a small number of pupils with low prior attainment is an area for development. Leaders are determined that these pupils should make as much, if not better, progress from their starting points as the other pupils throughout the school.

Leaders welcome external support and challenge. The local authority's early years consultant has worked with the early years staff to improve the provision for the youngest children. Again, this was an area for improvement identified by the previous inspection team. Although, you are still not satisfied with the proportion of children who reach a good level of development from lower starting points, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development overall improved from 56% in 2014 to 74% in 2017.

Governors give of their time willingly to support and challenge you and your leadership team. The new chair of the governing body has assumed the role confidently following a thorough handover from the previous, long-standing chair. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors challenge pupils' outcomes appropriately. Their support of your work to improve attendance has led to year-on-year improvements.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Your staff are fully trained in all aspects of safeguarding. They receive update training from you, as the designated safeguarding lead, throughout each academic year. The pupils feel safe and secure in and around school. They have a deep knowledge of how to keep themselves safe when working online, and have been taught about the dangers inherent in uploading 'rude photos' to social media.

You know the pupils and their families well. Your staff go the extra mile for the vulnerable pupils who attend St Michael's. The case studies that we looked at together showed the school's effective partnership work with a large number of external agencies.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, including governors, have a thorough understanding of the school's achievement data. The leadership team has identified the right priorities for further development. However, these priorities do not feed seamlessly into the school's action planning which, as you stated, is a work in progress. You acknowledge that the action plan would benefit from the inclusion of more measurable targets by which to evaluate progress.

- Leaders work proactively with parents, pupils and external agencies to improve attendance further. Creditably, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils improved from 94.5% during the 2015/16 academic year to 96.1% by the end of the 2016/17 year. Pupils appreciate the rewards for full attendance that you announce in celebration assembly each week.
- The teaching of phonics and early reading skills is now a strength of the school. Pupils use their phonic knowledge to read previously unknown words correctly. Teachers make sure that the books pupils read in school have just the right level of challenge. As a result, a very high proportion of pupils achieve the standard in the Year 1 check of phonic knowledge. In addition, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard, and achieve greater depth, in reading at the end of key stage 1 is well above the national average.
- Over time, more children are reaching a good level of development at the end of early years and a greater proportion are achieving the expected standard in reading and writing at the end of key stage 1. The provision for English is strong in the school.
- Leaders' plans to improve the progress made by pupils in mathematics are beginning to bear fruit. Pupils throughout the school provided detailed and well-reasoned answers to mathematical questions that were asked by their teachers during the inspection. Pupils are enjoying the new multiplication tables software and told me that their knowledge of multiplication tables is beginning to improve.
- The local authority's early years consultant has supported the development of the school's provision well. However, the early years leader has identified the need to develop the learning environment further for the youngest children in the school, particularly for the disadvantaged boys. This is an important area for school improvement.
- You, quite correctly, have identified that a small number of pupils with low prior attainment, together with a small number who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are not making sufficient progress. The provision made for these pupils, together with the expertise of staff, require further development.
- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent well to ensure that they reach the standards expected for their age. You were very pleased to point out that every disadvantaged pupil achieved the standard in the most recent check of phonics in Year 1.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils attend school regularly. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend school every day is particularly high. Pupils appreciate the rewards on offer for full attendance. Parents understand that their children miss valuable learning time if they take unauthorised holidays during term time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the areas for development identified by leaders in their evaluation of the school's effectiveness feed seamlessly into the school's improvement planning

- the impact of the improvement actions undertaken by staff is judged against clear and measurable targets by senior leaders, including governors
- the provision in early years meets the needs of all children well, especially the disadvantaged boys
- a greater proportion of pupils with low prior attainment reach the standards expected for their age in all key stages
- staff expertise in the identification of, and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is developed further.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I discussed the work of the school with you, the assistant headteacher, subject leaders and seven governors, including the chair of the governing body. I checked a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I examined information about pupils' achievement together with external evaluations of aspects of the school's work and minutes of meetings of the governing body. In addition, I held discussions with representatives of Northumberland local authority and the Church of England Diocese of Newcastle. I considered 36 free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Alongside you, I visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment. I checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks, took note of five responses by pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaire, talked formally to a group of six pupils and talked more informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktime about their learning. I also listened to pupils from Years 1 and 3 read.