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Mrs Ann Bradbury
Headteacher
St John's Catholic School for the Deaf (Boston Spa)
Church Street
Boston Spa
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Dear Mrs Bradbury

Short inspection of St John's Catholic School for the Deaf (Boston Spa)

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2018 with Fiona Dixon, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You lead your team with great dedication and enthusiasm. The high standards that you expect throughout the school enable pupils to consistently achieve beyond their expected outcomes. You have developed thorough systems and, with the support of your leadership team, you ensure that you meet the needs of each pupil. Your skilled leadership has supported the development of a strong, experienced and stable staff team.

Staff are unswerving in their approach to reinforcing the high expectations that you set. Your staff team are overwhelmingly proud to work at St John's. Staff enjoy the high levels of support that you provide. They talk about 'team spirit' and of working in a nurturing, caring, inclusive environment. Staff appreciate the opportunities they have to share their skills in weekly development meetings. They acknowledge the strong progress that pupils make and are visibly delighted that they have helped to make such differences in pupils' lives.

Staff know the pupils very well. Their deep understanding of each pupil ensures that they are always well informed of their academic, developmental and communication needs. Skilled teaching and support allow pupils to flourish and, as a result, they make strong and sustained progress.

Pupils are very happy at school. They are eager to share stories of their experiences of the many opportunities that you provide for them, for example trips to Rome, music workshops and shopping for cooking ingredients in the local community. Pupils understand and enjoy the high standards you set. They appreciate the work the staff do with them, particularly on their communication and social and emotional skills. Pupils state that there is absolutely nothing they would change about the school and the experiences they have. Pupils are highly motivated to be the best that they can be.

The school environment is calm and welcoming. Classrooms are well resourced and have a positive learning atmosphere. Bright, informative and well-kept displays can be seen throughout the school. Impressive and meaningful artwork, some about the long history of the school, has been skilfully designed to have an impact on visitors.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in your last inspection report. These include extensive development of the early years provision, including the outdoor play area, and ensuring the consistency in high-quality standards of teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school has a very strong safeguarding culture, in which all staff see it as their responsibility to keep children safe. Leaders ensure that all relevant checks that are required for those working with children are in place. Staff receive regular and effective training and are up to date with current legislation. They are clear and confident on the procedures that they must follow if they have any concerns.

Pupils feel safe at school. You equip them well with the knowledge of how to keep themselves safe in and out of school. During activities to increase independence, you provide extensive support and training. This ensures that older pupils are confident to communicate appropriately with members of the public when they travel alone.

Parents are highly supportive of the work that you and your staff do. One parent stated: 'The school has a very caring and nurturing feeling, making my son feel happy, safe and able to enjoy school.' This is typical of the comments made by parents.

Behaviour in and around school is exemplary. Pupils respect and care for each other and staff alike. Attendance at St John's is high. Pupils enjoy school and see no reason not to attend. Medical professionals carry out work in school to ensure that pupils do not have to miss lessons to attend appointments.

Inspection findings

- Staff are exceptionally skilled and have a deep understanding of the needs of each pupil. They work with dedication and without compromise to make sure that they are providing the best opportunities and learning experiences for pupils. Teaching is of a consistently high standard. Staff use resources effectively to enhance learning. They enable pupils with a range of special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to access the content of lessons without restriction. Pupils engage in lessons that are consistently motivating and exciting.
- Teachers use targets set in pupils' education, health and care plans effectively. They break these targets down into smaller, more manageable steps. Teachers then use these to plan lessons that will support and allow pupils to achieve well. Assessment systems are thorough and clearly show the progress that pupils are making. As a result, teachers have accurate data to reinforce their lesson planning.
- Teaching is highly individualised throughout the school. Teachers build on prior learning to encourage pupils to progress rapidly in relation to their SEND needs. Staff provide high levels of challenge. This develops pupils' resilience and further supports the high levels of progress that pupils make.
- Pupils make strong and sustained progress throughout all areas of the bespoke curriculum. However, opportunities for pupils to practise and reinforce their skills in writing are often missed. Pupils would benefit from more opportunities to write at length throughout the curriculum.
- The relationships between staff and pupils are exceptional. Staff care for pupils with a depth of understanding and sensitivity. Pupils are clear that being at St John's has made a significant and positive impact on their lives. This is reflected in the substantial achievements made by past pupils who have gone on to make important contributions to society. These pupils are inspirational to current pupils.
- The personal development of pupils is excellent. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is interwoven throughout the school day. Pupils learn about other cultures and religions. They have opportunities to meet a wide range of people from different backgrounds. For example, the school was recently visited by a teacher from a school for the deaf in Rwanda. The impact of this visit was significant in developing the pupils' understanding of the world around them. Other visitors to school have included members of a Gurdwara, a local Member of Parliament, the Bishop of Leeds and pupils from the local primary school.
- You and your leadership team have a deep understanding of the school and the needs of the pupils. You continually strive to provide high-quality, wide-ranging experiences for the pupils.
- You are very well supported by a skilled and experienced governing body that provides challenge and support to you and your team. Governors understand the school and its purpose well. They spend time in school, and this allows them to develop a greater understanding of the day-to-day processes that take place.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are further opportunities to write at length throughout the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Sara Roe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. We also talked to the chair of the governing body. We examined information about pupils' progress and looked at pupils' workbooks carefully. We checked a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, external evaluations of aspects of the school's work, the school's development plan and minutes of meetings of the governing body. We considered the eight written responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. We visited all classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment. We were accompanied by you or your assistant headteacher on all of these visits. A formal discussion was held with five pupils from a range of year groups. We talked more informally to pupils in lessons and around the school.