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23 April 2018

Mr Nick Conway
Headteacher
St Aloysius RC Voluntary Aided Infant School
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Dear Mr Conway

Short inspection of St Aloysius RC Voluntary Aided Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2018, 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 St Aloysius school was judged to be good in September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last 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 certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2013, you have shown exceptional leadership. The potential shown by you, the senior leadership team and governors in the last inspection has been realised. This has resulted in outcomes that have improved steadily. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017 was consistently above the national average at the expected standard and at greater depth at the end of key stage 1. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017 for disadvantaged pupils was broadly in line at the expected standard, and mathematics at greater depth compares favourably with the national average at the end of key stage 1.

You are supported well by your senior leadership team and governors, who are similarly ambitious to provide the best possible education for pupils. Along with your leaders and governors, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Leaders' self-evaluation and improvement plan clearly identify the correct priorities for improving the school further and raising pupils' achievements.

Leaders, staff and governors have successfully tackled the areas of improvement identified at the previous inspection. The leadership team and governors have invested in a broad range of high-quality professional development opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants. Staff are provided with opportunities to work in other schools to develop their skills. This has supported adults' growth and development effectively. Teachers now make good use of assessment to tailor work carefully to address pupils' learning needs. Targeted support is delivered promptly to ensure that all groups of pupils achieve well. Senior leaders challenge and support teaching staff to provide high-quality teaching. This robust approach ensures that teaching and learning are consistently strong across school.

Pupils' outcomes in writing have improved steadily since the last inspection. In 2017, outcomes for writing were above average at the end of key stage 1. Teaching of writing across school is consistently strong. A sophisticated range of strategies are used. Expectations are very high across school. Adults intervene and teach writing skills effectively. Leaders have developed a, 'secret garden', which provides a stimulating focus for pupils' writing. Curriculum learning projects provide pupils with the opportunity to further improve their writing skills across a wide range of subjects. Pupils from different starting points make strong progress, as seen in books.

During our visits to Nursery and Reception classrooms, we observed children who were well engaged during writing lessons. Pupils' work demonstrated the effective use of phonics and sentence punctuation. Leaders have a clear focus on reading and children in early years and across school are encouraged to develop a love of reading.

Leaders and governors have correctly identified that that there is a difference in attainment and progress for disadvantaged pupils when compared with pupils nationally. The school's assessment information shows this is particularly noticeable in Reception and Year 2, in reading, writing and mathematics. The majority of these pupils have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. You recognise that it is essential that leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils sustain high rates of progress, in order to maximise their attainment at the end of key stage 1. Leaders and governors are actively exploring a range of ways to best support pupils who are disadvantaged and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. You use pupil premium funding and special educational needs funding effectively to put interventions in place. The pupil premium leader tracks the individual attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils rigorously. During our visits to Year 2 classrooms, we observed targeted support in writing. Pupils discussed and then used challenging vocabulary to improve their writing. Books demonstrated that targeted provision helps pupils make rapid progress. Leaders' approach to supporting pupils is accurately tailored and personalised.

Safeguarding is effective

You and your governing body afford a high priority to keeping pupils safe and there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The leadership team has

ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They carry out appropriately stringent checks for staff, governors, initial teacher education students and volunteers. You ensure that all staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training, including training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Bite-size training is undertaken by all staff to brief them on emerging issues. Staff, therefore, know how to execute their duties in protecting pupils and keeping them safe.

Leaders have ensured that training relating to emotional well-being is well established. You and your staff work effectively with parents, carers and other agencies and take prompt action if you have concerns about a pupil's welfare. Leaders and governors have ensured that the school is well resourced with knowledgeable and caring staff who provide support for vulnerable pupils. For example, leaders and governors have provided a sensory area and quiet areas for pupils who require this provision.

Leaders are proactive about attendance: they do all they can to ensure that pupils attend school on a regular basis. Governors proactively check safeguarding arrangements. They meet with the designated safeguarding lead, check the single central record and conduct regular health and safety monitoring visits. Consequently, staff and governors understand the safeguarding procedures and their own responsibilities.

Inspection findings

- You, and your staff, have worked hard to improve pupils' outcomes across the school. Consequently, pupils' progress and attainment compare very favourably with national averages at the end of key stage 1. Your leaders for early years, English, SEN and/or disabilities, pupil premium and science check the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes regularly and act promptly to drive improvement. All leaders are aware of the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Reception and Year 2 and that of pupils nationally.
- Leaders shared examples of pupils' work in geography, history, science and English that demonstrated that disadvantaged pupils were making good and often rapid progress across all year groups. Your assessments of current pupils and the evidence found in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils continue to make good and often rapid progress across all year groups. The challenge for the most-able pupils is evident. Work in books demonstrates that there are lots of opportunities for pupils to write at length in other subjects and that subject-specific vocabulary is developed well.
- Teachers use assessment information well to target pupils. Teaching is tailored carefully to meet the needs of all pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities. During our visits to classrooms in Year 2, pupils were provided with individual and small-group support to develop their writing skills. Precise questions and clear explanations ensured that pupils could access challenging vocabulary and write correctly demarcated sentences. High expectations were evident: correct letter formation and quality handwriting were expected.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and all staff have high expectations. Praise is used well to develop pupils' confidence and independence. During our visit to the Nursery classroom, we saw children writing using their phonic skills, successfully. Children were able to write their names and a range of three-letter words. Children, discussing the parts of a flower, demonstrated their understanding of simple scientific concepts; 'The stem of the flower is used to hold it up!' one child stated; another said, 'Flowers contain pollen.'
- In early years, the percentage of children achieving a good level of development has risen steadily and is now above the national average. During our visit to the Reception class, pupils used actions to retell their visit to a farm. Teachers' precise questioning skills encouraged children to use their phonics skills to write. Children used pictures and symbols to write independently about their visit. Work in children's books demonstrated an emphasis on correct letter formation, good-quality presentation of handwriting and children's ability to write at length.
- Over the last three years, there has been an improvement in pupils' phonics results in the Year 1 phonics screening check. In 2016 and 2017, the school's results were in line with the national average. By the end of Year 2 in 2017, 97% of pupils achieved the expected standard. In Year 1, we saw phonics teaching tailored to meet the needs of all pupils, including the most-able and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The most-able pupils identified split diagraphs and used this information to read a challenging text.
- Pupils feel safe in school and know how to keep safe. They understand what bullying means and if they have a problem, know that staff will help them sort it out. In the classroom and at playtime, pupils are polite. They listen carefully to each other and adults. They have a good awareness of internet safety and know it is important not to share their computer passwords.
- Pupils report that they enjoy reading at school and at home with adults. Parents are overwhelmingly positive and proud of their children's school. They feel the school keeps them well informed of their children's progress. Parents particularly appreciate the many opportunities they have to visit school, with one example being the opportunity to visit the 'secret garden'.
- Governors have high expectations and an outward-looking approach. They work hard to improve the provision for pupils. Governors provide challenge to leaders and know the school's priorities for improvement. Governors attend termly reviews where updates are provided about the school improvement plan, pupils' progress and other issues. These meetings are attended by the leadership team, middle leaders and the local authority representative. The information shared at this meeting ensures that governors know how well pupils are performing and enables them to measure the impact of any financial decisions they make. The SEN and/or disabilities governor works in close partnership with the SEN coordinator and visits school termly to review provision. Following these visits, a report of the findings is shared with the governing body.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils sustain high rates of progress in order to maximise their attainment at the end of key stage 1.

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 South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Frances Gowland
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I discussed the work of the school with leaders. I held meetings with leaders for English, science, early years, pupil premium, SEN and/or disabilities and with a representative from your local authority. I visited six classes across school and five targeted interventions with you. I observed and spoke with pupils at playtime. I spoke by telephone with the deputy director of the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body and the special educational needs governor. I scrutinised a range of documentation relating to safeguarding, bullying, exclusions, referrals, open cases and attendance. I analysed pupils' current progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. I considered four responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and information received during the inspection and considered the school's recent survey of parents' views.