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Mrs Sarah Alley
Headteacher
Our Lady of Dolours RC Primary School
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Dear Mrs Alley

Short inspection of Our Lady of Dolours RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, your senior team, staff and governors seek to provide a nurturing yet challenging environment which allows pupils to thrive. The senior leadership team is accurate and forthright in its evaluation of the school and has clear and sound plans to secure further improvements, particularly to pupils' progress. Leaders at every level have ownership of the initiatives the school has taken to bring about planned improvements. They have worked hard to ensure that these initiatives meet the needs of pupils and are embedded across the school through consistently good teaching.

A culture of positive challenge is provided by the governing body, which supports and holds the senior leadership team to account. Governors have a clear understanding of areas of focus for the school and assist the senior team in its drive for improvement.

Pupils are polite and enthusiastic, and genuinely enjoy their learning experience. They are keen readers both in school and at home. Pupils are investigative learners who enjoy asking questions and using their skills to find out answers.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a rise in standards. In 2017, the proportions of pupils in Year 6 attaining the expected and higher levels exceeded national averages in reading and mathematics, and were broadly equal to national averages in writing. This reflected progress that was at least average and often above.

The previous inspection report asked the school to focus on mathematics to ensure that work was well matched to pupils' prior attainment. The school has been largely successful in this. However, despite the very good results in 2017, the most able pupils currently in the school are not challenged sufficiently in mathematics lessons. Additionally, as leaders acknowledge, pupils' attendance is not as high as it should be; leaders need to continue to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders and governors understand their statutory responsibilities to keep children safe and see this as a high priority. All the required staff employment checks have been completed and records show that referrals to external agencies are appropriate, timely and followed up. All staff understand the guidance given in 'Keeping children safe in education'. A particular focus of staff training has been on protecting pupils from abuse and neglect. Staff have a detailed understanding of the issues facing pupils and this has equipped them well to deal with an emergency.

Online safety is a high priority and school leaders work with pupils, parents and carers on this issue. Regular training sessions are held for parents to ensure that they are aware of age-appropriate internet use and how to keep their children safe online.

Inspection findings

- First, I investigated how the school has raised standards in mathematics and reading and what action leaders are taking to ensure that this improvement is sustained. I did this because test results in mathematics and reading have shown a marked improvement over the last two years. I visited mathematics and reading lessons, spoke to pupils and listened to them read, looked at books and met with senior leaders.
- I found that teachers have tailored their mathematics lessons well to meet the needs of pupils in the school. They have restructured lessons to place an increased focus on the correct use of mathematical vocabulary and to emphasise reasoning skills. Even so, the most able pupils are not consistently challenged to work at greater depth through problem-solving activities.
- There have also been changes in the teaching of reading. Leaders have ensured that teachers have adopted a consistent approach. Pupils now read texts so that they are familiar with them, before using lesson time to explore the texts in greater depth to deepen pupils' understanding.
- I next investigated whether the school is effective in improving the attendance of pupils and reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent. I did this because the overall attendance of pupils is lower than the national average and an above-average proportion are persistently absent. To investigate this, I looked at the current attendance figures for the school and met with the school's 'family practitioner'.

- Attendance information is analysed thoroughly and effectively and is used to put actions in place to support those not attending. Leaders also encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own attendance through competitions and rewards. These strategies are having an impact and, consequently, attendance is improving and persistent absenteeism is reducing.
- Third, I investigated what the school is doing to support writing at key stage 2, especially for pupils who are disadvantaged, middle prior attainers, and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The 2017 results show that these groups of pupils, who together form a majority in the school, did not make as much progress in writing as their peers with higher starting points. To investigate this, I visited lessons, looked at examples of writing across a range of subjects and met with senior leaders.
- Leaders have a strategic plan in place to improve writing. Teachers have put interventions in place for younger pupils so that their writing skills are given good foundations. Targeted one-to-one support is given to disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities so that they are able to make the same progress from their starting points as their peers. Writing is a focus across the curriculum, with a wide variety of genres and styles explored in lessons. Teachers make use of different stimuli to encourage all pupils to enjoy writing.
- Finally, I investigated how senior leaders have ensured that the improvements made in English and mathematics are mirrored across the curriculum. I did this to ensure that leaders have maintained a focus on wider curriculum coverage during a period where test results in English and mathematics have improved significantly. I visited lessons, looked at books from a range of subjects and met with leaders.
- I found that senior and middle leaders have carefully planned the curriculum so purposeful links can be made between the broad range of subjects offered. The structured approach used in reading and mathematics can be seen in other subjects. For example, science lessons follow an investigative structure, allowing pupils to develop their scientific skills while simultaneously practising their writing, problem-solving and reasoning skills. Teachers and leaders have equally high expectations across all subjects, but recognise that there is more work to do to bring about consistently high-quality provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance is improved so it is at least in line with national averages
- the quality of teaching is improved so that standards in mathematics for most-able pupils are raised further.

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

Yours sincerely

Amy Jackson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other senior leaders and teachers. I spoke to the chair of the governing body and the local authority link adviser by telephone. I also met with the consultant who supports you with the checks made on staff and with the school's 'family practitioner'. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, information on the attendance of current pupils and the register of checks made on staff. I spoke to pupils and listened to them read. I visited lessons across the school and looked at pupils' work in these lessons and over time.