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Mrs Susan Costello
Executive Principal
Connor Downs Academy
Mutton Hill
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Dear Mrs Costello

Short inspection of Connor Downs Academy

Following my visit to the school on 19 June 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The areas identified for improvement during that inspection, including meeting the needs of pupils with high prior attainment and more effective monitoring of the progress of all pupils, have been addressed well.

You and the other leaders are passionate about raising pupils' aspirations. You take effective action to do this, including through visits to universities and to a local secondary school's specialist provision for science, technology and mathematics. The innovative development of the outside learning space, together with its classroom and animals, enriches pupils' experiences of science and geography. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by an extensive range of clubs, sporting activities, visits and residential trips. These include visits to France, various places of worship and the Houses of Parliament and a visit from the local Member of Parliament.

Parents value the caring ethos of the school. Staff successfully nurture pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Pupils are keen to learn. They develop resilience in their learning and take great pride in the presentation of their work. They are exceptionally well mannered.

You rigorously evaluate pupils' progress and accurately identify areas for improvement. You and the other members of the leadership team address the areas effectively. For example, progress and attainment in mathematics declined in 2016,

particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who had average prior attainment. You drew successfully on training and support provided by the trust to increase teachers' knowledge of the new mathematics curriculum requirements, especially in problem-solving and reasoning. As a result, pupils' progress improved. Progress for the most able pupils was above average in 2017.

You and other leaders have secured strong provision in the early years. This has led to an improving trend over time in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development. There is also an upward trend in the number of pupils achieving the expected level in the key stage 1 phonics screening check. A high proportion of pupils met the expected standard in 2017. Across the school, pupils make strong progress in writing. This is due to teachers' secure subject knowledge and improvements in lesson planning. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have low prior attainment consistently make progress in writing in line with pupils in the top 20% of schools nationally. Pupils achieve well in their use of grammar and punctuation, and their spelling and reading comprehension are improving.

You have accurately identified the need to diminish differences between the progress of some groups of pupils. Boys and pupils who have average prior attainment or special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are not making as much progress as others across the school. The recently reviewed curriculum topics, reading material and activities are beginning to inspire pupils, and boys in particular, to learn. However, teaching is not yet adapted consistently well enough to address the gaps in some pupils' learning, especially in their vocabulary and comprehension.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the staff are vigilant in keeping pupils safe. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All the required checks on staff are carried out robustly and records are well organised. Rigorous monitoring ensures that training is up to date for all staff, including in preventing radicalisation and extremism. Consequently, staff are confident in dealing with any issues that arise.

Pupils report that they feel safe in the school and Ofsted's online surveys show that parents and staff agree. Pupils say there is little bullying in the school. They are confident in the knowledge that staff deal promptly with any concerns they may have. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe, including from online bullying.

Inspection findings

- To check that the school remains good, my first line of enquiry was to ascertain how successfully leaders are improving the uneven progress pupils make. In particular, my enquiry focused on how well teachers use assessment to improve the progress of boys, disadvantaged pupils, pupils who had average prior attainment and those who receive support for SEN and/or disabilities.
- The trust has supported you well in rigorously and systematically tracking the

progress of all pupils across year groups in all subjects. You regularly hold teachers to account for their pupils' progress and support them effectively in making improvements. Teaching assistants are well trained and are enabling pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, to develop independence in their thinking and learning. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils. This is evident in the challenging lesson objectives and the resources they use. The recent review of topics and materials has resulted in teaching which is engaging boys more readily in their learning.

- Pupils make substantial progress when teaching includes regular checking and deepening of their understanding. Some teaching is not yet adapted well enough to secure some pupils' understanding or to cover the gaps in their previous learning. This leads to these pupils not making the progress of which they are capable. The pupils are often boys and have average prior attainment or SEN and/or disabilities.
- My second line of enquiry was to check how well leaders are improving pupils' progress and attainment in reading and in spelling. This is because progress in reading had declined over time and scores in spelling were not as high as for other aspects of writing in 2017.
- You had already accurately identified these areas as priorities for improvement. Staff are taking effective action to improve them. For example, a systematic approach to teaching spelling across the school is leading to higher standards in pupils' work. Initiatives such as discussing a class novel and reading for information across subjects are helping to improve pupils' reading comprehension. However, for some pupils, including some who have SEN and/or disabilities, their comprehension is impeded by a limited range and understanding of vocabulary.
- My third and final line of enquiry was to assess the effectiveness of the school's strategies for addressing persistent absence. Attendance has remained broadly average over time. However, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent increased to above the national figure in 2017.
- Your robust evaluation of the reasons for absence leads to relevant actions to reduce it. Your effective actions include ensuring that parents understand the school's policy on not authorising holidays during term time. You inform parents appropriately about the negative impact that absence has on their children's progress. In addition, your inclusion leader telephones or visits identified families to provide guidance and support. These actions have led to a reduction in persistent absence to below the national figure.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, especially boys and those who have average prior attainment or SEN and/or disabilities, make substantial and sustained progress, by:
 - ensuring that teaching consistently and regularly includes checking and

extending their understanding and addresses any gaps in their prior learning

- developing pupils' range of vocabulary and their understanding of the texts and questions they read across subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Aspire Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner, and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the head of school, subject leaders and the SEN/inclusion leader. In addition, I met with two of the trust-hub councillors and a group of pupils. I met informally with some parents and spoke with staff and pupils at lunchtime. I also listened to a small group of pupils reading. Together, you, the head of school and I observed learning in all classes. We examined a sample of pupils' work in their books over time, alongside their progress information. I examined a range of documents, including your self-evaluation, improvement planning and documents relating to pupils' progress and safety. I took account of the 73 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey and several written responses from parents. I considered the 28 responses to the online staff survey and 85 responses to the online pupil survey.