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15 June 2018

Mr J Carney
Headteacher
St Austin's Catholic Primary School
Riverbank Road
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Dear Mr Carney

Short inspection of St Austin's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead with passion, good humour and conviction. Your school's mission statement, 'In our school, where everyone is special, we will love and serve as Jesus taught', shines out in all that you do for your school family.

You are well supported by a dedicated governing body. It knows the school well and has a clear and innovative vision for its future development. Additionally, your experienced deputy headteacher and senior leadership team share your vision and work hard to ensure that the school continues to develop further.

You have worked with staff to introduce a broad, balanced and exciting curriculum. The results of the staff survey indicate that staff are proud to be members of the school and feel that the school is well led and managed. Pupils are equally proud of their school. An overwhelming majority noted in the pupil survey that teachers help them to do their best.

In the previous inspection report, inspectors highlighted, as a strength of the school, the innovative way in which the teaching of Spanish is undertaken. You have sustained this strength and are justly proud to be a local authority 'Centre of Excellence' for this modern foreign language.

During the last inspection, inspectors also noted ways in which the school could be further developed. You have been proactive in addressing these issues.

Firstly, inspectors noted the need for leaders to increase opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills across a range of subjects in order to help them make faster progress. This has been addressed most successfully. Leaders ensure that these opportunities are woven through the curriculum. Teachers and learning support staff receive training to develop further their skills in the teaching of this subject. Additionally, parents and carers have attended workshops to further their ability to support their children at home in an effective manner. You are particularly proud of the opportunities provided for parents to come into school to talk to pupils about the importance of using mathematics in real life situations. As a consequence of this work, you received a numeracy Quality Mark gold award. Additionally, your school's most recent published data shows that, by the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment is well above that seen nationally at both the expected and the higher levels.

Inspectors also highlighted the need to ensure that learning support staff are involved in developing pupils' learning in all parts of a lesson so that all groups of pupils are encouraged to achieve as well as they can. Once again, much progress has been made in this area. Learning support staff now plan alongside teachers and are aware of pupils' individual needs. Your own monitoring identifies that these members of staff make a more significant contribution to learning in all parts of lessons. However, you have accurately identified that you now need to plan to ensure that learning support staff work in a more focused way to support the most able pupils in school.

During the inspection, we considered areas where further work is required to support your school improvement. Based on evidence, we agreed that further work is required to identify and address the barriers which are preventing the most able pupils achieving at the higher levels in reading in school. Additionally, the progress and attainment of pupils in writing requires further development, especially for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. This is to ensure that progress and attainment for these pupils matches that seen by other groups in school. Finally, we agreed that not enough opportunities are provided in foundation subjects to allow pupils to further develop their reading and writing skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your school site is secure and staff are vigilant in making sure that the security details of all visitors are checked on entry to school. Visitors are welcomed and information is provided for them on entry, relating to safeguarding and health and safety. This includes fire safety procedures.

Parents are confident in the school's arrangements to keep their children safe. Almost all parents who responded to Parent view, Ofsted's online survey, said that their children were well looked after and felt safe in school. Pupils have a clear understanding of, and respect for, diversity. Pupils' behaviour is strong and contributes positively to the harmony that is clear to see in school. They understand the importance of staying safe both in the 'real world' and online. However, pupils

spoken to during the inspection share leaders' concerns about inappropriate comments being made by a small number of pupils on social networking sites. Leaders are trying to nip this issue in the bud by giving more advice to parents and pupils.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed a number of lines of enquiry. The first considered the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to increase the number of children who achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Your school information clearly shows that children enter school with skills that are below those expected for their age. This is most noticeable in the areas of speech and communication. Leaders undertook a review of the Reception curriculum to check that the provision enabled children to make rapid progress. As a result of this review, you have increased opportunities for children to read and write. The teaching of phonics starts at an earlier point and parents are encouraged to join their children in school for activities such as 'stay and play'. Such activities help parents to understand how their children learn.
- The impact of changes ensure that the Reception environment is bright and airy, with a range of opportunities provided for children to develop their skills across the whole curriculum. The work undertaken by leaders and teachers has also led to a three-year rising trend in the number of children achieving a good level of development at the expected levels. Leaders are aware, however, that further work is required to provide opportunities for the most able children to exceed the expected levels in reading and writing by the end of the Reception Year.
- We also examined the efforts made by leaders to challenge pupils of all abilities, including the most able, in reading at key stage 1 and 2. Leaders ensure that reading for pleasure is encouraged within school. You provide opportunities for older pupils to be 'book buddies' with younger pupils to support their reading skills. Additionally, a book club is provided to develop further a love of reading. During World Book Day, you were proud to open your new school library. This enhances further pupils' access to high-quality literature. As a consequence of this drive, you were proud to receive a Quality Mark silver award for reading.
- Alongside creating a love for reading, leaders ensure that reading skills are taught in a systematic fashion. A wide range of high quality books have been recently purchased to ensure that pupils of all abilities receive appropriate challenge. However, during the inspection, the level of challenge in reading was more noticeable in key stage 1 pupils' books and teaching information than in key stage 2. You have started to review reasons for this difference and to place more focus on meeting the needs of the most able pupils.
- My next line of enquiry considered the work undertaken by leaders to ensure that the most able pupils are being challenged to reach the higher levels in writing. This line of enquiry was no surprise to you and forms part of your own school improvement planning. You provide teachers with support and training around the assessment of writing. This has ensured that their moderation skills are accurate. Additionally, you have appointed an extra leader for literacy in key stage 2 to lead improvements in this area. Teachers provide opportunities for

pupils to write extended pieces of text in their literacy lessons. We agreed, however, when we looked at pupils' books, that challenge for the most able writers was not always high enough to enable them to reach their full potential. We also noted that opportunities to practise high-quality writing throughout the curriculum were hampered by the provision of sheets, which limit the amount pupils can write, and affect the overall presentation of the writing produced.

- Your school provides effective support for pupils who are disadvantaged. You use your assessment and tracking system well to ensure that their progress and attainment are being monitored closely. Pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide additional support for these pupils, both within lessons and in support activities. As a consequence, leaders are aware, from scrutiny of books and analysis of performance information, that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is beginning to increase and the gap between these pupils and others is diminishing. Leaders accept, however, that further challenge is required in lessons to ensure that a larger number of disadvantaged pupils reach the higher levels in reading and writing throughout school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they identify the barriers to learning and further improve progress and develop the skills of the most able readers throughout school, including those who are disadvantaged.
- the progress and attainment of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in writing is further developed by providing more challenging expectations in all lessons
- they closely monitor pupils' work to ensure that more opportunities are provided in foundation subjects for pupils to practise and develop their reading and writing skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and the senior leadership team. I also met with three governors, including the acting chair of the governing body. I met with the business manager to evaluate your record of checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children. I met with subject leaders to discuss pupils' current performance in school. I also met with the school's local authority quality assurance officer. I had a formal discussion with a group of pupils.

Accompanied by you, I visited all classes to observe teaching and learning. I evaluated pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised examples of pupils' work and reviewed documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning and current performance information. I also took account of the 68 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 25 responses from the staff survey and 120 responses from the pupil survey. I also considered information posted on the school's website.