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5 December 2016

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Dear Mr Jee

Short inspection of Aldrington CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 November 2016, 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You have led the school with unwavering determination to improve the effectiveness of your school to secure better outcomes for the pupils in your care. Your infectious enthusiasm and fortitude have flowed throughout your school and galvanised both pupils and parents to share your ambition and passion for the future of the school. You have been extremely well supported by able senior leaders, knowledgeable governors and eager staff that form a united team, and are willing to reflect and learn to improve their own effectiveness. Thus, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your insightful and forward-thinking strategic vision has ensured that you have managed the impact of expanding numbers well, while maintaining the school's strong community ethos and entrenched moral values. You are already planning for the transformation in systems and staffing structures that will undoubtedly happen as a result of further expansion, so that the strengths of your school are maintained and improved upon.

You have secured parents' support for the school. Subsequently, parents overwhelmingly say that the school is well led and managed, and would recommend the school to another parent. This statement sums up the views of many parents: 'Aldrington is a wonderful community of happy children, supportive parents and inspirational staff. Children thrive and progress well in this nurturing environment. I feel proud and privileged to be a part of the school.'

Most pupils enter the school with knowledge, skills and understanding that are broadly typical for children of their age. By the time they leave the school, pupils' achievement is typically higher than the national average. This school is characteristically a high-performing school where more pupils have reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics than the national average, and this year is no exception. This is noteworthy given the increased expectations of the new primary curriculum. Your work to support pupils throughout the last academic year was commendable, especially for those pupils requiring additional help to access learning, who made good progress from their various starting points as a result. However, despite this, the proportion reaching both expected standards and the highest levels of attainment, known as greater depth, was not as high as in previous years, especially in writing. This trend is also reflected in pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 1. Only a small number of pupils reached greater depth in writing and mathematics in key stage 1 2016 assessments.

You have tackled this head on. Aply supported by your assistant headteachers, you have carefully analysed the reasons for this, and already put in place strategies to restore the very high outcomes that pupils have achieved in previous years. Even now, the school's own performance information and work in pupils' books demonstrate that your high aspirations for pupils' achievement are coming to fruition. Encouragingly, nearly all parents say that their children make good progress at the school and feel that they are well informed about their progress.

You and your staff have worked creditably to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection. You have strengthened the effectiveness of leadership through identifying talent and appointing two very able assistant headteachers to support you in raising standards across the school. Together, you have continued to focus on raising the quality of teaching, especially in writing and mathematics. Learning is personalised well to the specific needs of pupils, and because of this, pupils are challenged, including those who are the most able. Staff demonstrate high expectations and promote pupils' independence. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved to become consistently good across the school. This in turn has impacted on the progress that pupils make. Consequently, attainment in mathematics has risen to that of reading. Pupils' achievement in English punctuation, spelling and grammar is significantly higher than the national average, including for disadvantaged pupils, and with the exception of 2016 assessments in key stages 1 and 2, pupils' achievement in writing was significantly above the national average for the previous two years.

You are seeking to grow leadership capacity further in response to increasing pupil numbers, and consequently you have delegated responsibility to steer subject development to middle leaders. Middle leaders support you and value the opportunities they have to contribute to school development. Still more work needs to be done to mould them into confident leaders who utilise information available to them to hone in on areas for improvement in the subjects for which they are responsible.

You know the strengths of the school and what needs to be accomplished to make

the school even better in impressive detail. You are highly analytical, reflective and honest about the school's effectiveness, and because of this, are able to focus on school improvement with unambiguous clarity. For instance, you know that the quality of teaching of writing is still variable across the school. Sometimes, pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to apply what they have learned in their writing, nor are they expected to demonstrate the same high level of writing skills across a wide range of subjects, such as in history or science.

I know that you are determined to address this inconsistency by developing a whole-school shared approach to building pupils' writing skills as they move through the school. Indeed, plans are already afoot.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Governors take their responsibility to protect pupils very seriously and bring professional expertise to this area of the school's work. A culture of care and vigilance pervades the school because discussion and openness about wider safeguarding concerns, such as the risk of radicalisation, are encouraged.

Positive relationships fortify the work of the school in this area, alongside staff's excellent knowledge of each pupil. The school works highly effectively with parents and wider agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and flourish in this nurturing environment.

Pupils have a clear understanding of what constitutes bullying and say that it rarely happens at their school. The school's 'Friendship and Kindness Week' has helped them to develop clarity in their understanding of bullying and know what to do if they are worried. Pupils unanimously say that they are listened to and that their opinions matter to staff. They know that adults will help them to sort things out if incidents do occur. Parents are united in their agreement that pupils feel safe at the school.

Leaders have introduced a whole-school approach to safety awareness and resilience and abuse which aims to support pupils from Reception to Year 6, known as 'feeling good, feeling safe'. As a result, pupils are developing the skills they need to keep themselves safe and know how to get help if they need it.

Attendance is above the national average. This is because school leaders have worked purposefully to ensure that pupils are punctual and attend school every day. Leaders have effectively communicated this expectation to parents. You have worked hard to create an environment in which pupils feel central to the school's purpose and therefore enjoy coming to school. One parent said of her child: 'Our daughter quite literally skips to school every morning, and I simply cannot praise this school enough.' A very small number of pupils take too many days off school. Sometimes this is through no fault of their own. Nonetheless, you have been diligent in your work to support families and seek external advice to find solutions

when attendance is potentially a barrier to learning. This has reaped rewards for some pupils, whose attendance has improved dramatically.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are kind, considerate and empathetic. Their attitudes in lessons reflect the school's six values of love, integrity, responsibility, achievement, community and respect. Pupils are taking increasing ownership of their learning and challenge themselves to make progress in lessons, especially in mathematics. Consequently, they are resilient and persevere even when work is thought-provoking and taxing. Leaders are working towards pupils developing an intrinsic desire to do well, fostered alongside growth mindset as the nucleus for learning.
- A strong sense of respect and equality of opportunity permeates the school. Leaders have worked effectively to improve pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, underpinned by the school's own Christian values, which are firmly supportive of, and promote, British values. Pupils universally say that the school encourages them to treat everyone with respect. Pupils of all ages were able to describe to me what British values meant to them, one saying that 'you can't live without them'. Parents, too, are very complimentary about this aspect of the school's work. A parent captured the views of many, saying that the school is 'a great learning environment that instils great values such as kindness and being a good citizen'.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, and in particular your leadership. They feel involved in their children's education and are proud to be part of the school community. One parent's enthusiasm for the school reflected so many parents' views, saying: 'I feel blessed to have my son at Aldrington and I know most of my peers feel the same!' Another parent exclaimed: 'Incredible school; we feel like our children have won the lottery by being able to attend this school.'
- Children receive a very good start to their education in early years and are well prepared for Year 1. The environment is stimulating. Children have access to a plethora of activities to help them make effective progress across all areas of learning. As a result, the proportion of children who reach a good level of development by the end of early years is above the national average and has been for the past three years. You recognise the need to ensure that this positive start is built upon throughout key stage 1, by ensuring that children's performance information is used well to make certain that their needs are met right from the start of Year 1.
- Early years leaders are adept at pinpointing areas for improvement and implement strategies that impact positively on children's outcomes. For example, although boys have made good progress in their writing, too few have reached a good level of development in the past compared to girls. This year, the proportion of boys who have reached the expected ability in writing for their age is above the national average. Although even more girls reached a good level of development, the differences have been significantly and rapidly diminished.
- Pupils are taught the early stages of reading highly effectively. Thus, the proportion of pupils that reach the expected standard in the phonics screening

check by the end of Year 1 has been above the national average for the past three years. Leaders continue to support the very few pupils who find phonics tricky and, where possible, to reach the expected standard by the following year. Pupils use their phonics to read unfamiliar words and to help them with their spelling. Children in the early years are already blending phonemes to read consonant-vowel-consonant words, such as the title of the book 'Zac and the vet'. The school encourages a love of reading, and because of the solid foundation pupils receive, they make strong progress and achieve well.

- Work in books shows the wide range of vocabulary and punctuation used by pupils in their writing. Pupils have secure grammatical knowledge because it is taught well across the school. A Year 2 pupil wrote: 'I feel cold, scared and lonely, but I'm also very excited because it's a new beginning.' The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, work towards meeting challenging targets, such as using commas after fronted adverbials.
- Pupils' books show that they can respond to mathematical challenges in order to tackle increasingly difficult calculations. Overall, pupils make good progress in mathematics and there are encouraging signs that the proportion of pupils working at expected levels or at greater depth is rising. This is because learning is generally matched well to pupils' ability and teaching enables pupils to build on what they already know. However, work in pupils' books show that the opportunity for pupils to reason and problem-solve is variable across the school.
- Leaders have ambitious expectations for pupils' outcomes. They have taken account of the fact that the standards expected by the end of each academic year have risen. Leaders have made an appropriate response by adopting an online assessment system that tracks the progress and achievement of pupils against the new curriculum. Staff are using this to plan lessons that meet the needs of pupils. The vast majority of pupils make good progress as a result. Leaders use this to identify precisely how much progress is required for pupils who are falling behind in their learning to catch up with their peers. Teachers are held to account for the progress that pupils make and understand their accountability to ensure that learning meets the needs of all pupils.
- In some year groups, boys' achievement is higher than girls' and in some groups the opposite is true. This is because pupils sometimes have additional educational needs that have an impact on their learning. 2016 assessments reflect this variability between boys' and girls' attainment. However, carefully planned intervention and support for pupils ensures that the vast majority of boys and girls make good progress from their various starting points. In addition, learning is well matched to their needs and leaders have worked hard to capture girls' and boys' imagination so that they are enthused to find out more.
- The most able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs. Evidence in pupils' work shows that learning is tailored to help them think more deeply and apply what they know in a range of ways. This is especially true in mathematics, where pupils work through 'chilli challenges' towards mathematics mastery, at a pace that suits their needs. The most able pupils told me that learning was rarely too easy for them, but sometimes they would like more opportunities to embed their learning before moving on to a new piece of work.
- The additional government funding, known as pupil premium, is allocated

effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their various starting points. There are too few eligible pupils to compare progress and achievement for this group year on year. The school's effective work in this area is underpinned by the acute knowledge that staff have of each pupil's needs. In spite of this, few disadvantaged pupils make enough progress to reach the highest levels of attainment, particularly in writing and mathematics. You are acutely aware of this and have targeted the most able disadvantaged pupils to make accelerated progress this year.

- The curriculum is broad and enriched by exciting trips and activities that enhance pupils' learning. Imaginative topic titles, such as 'Red Rockets and Rainbows' and 'Beware the King', captivate pupils' imagination to want to learn more. Consequently, pupils enjoy their learning. When asked what they enjoy most about their school, pupils listed a huge range of subjects, such as art and science, because they say teachers make them creative, practical and fun. A parent reflected upon this, saying that: 'My children love coming to school. They never say "school is boring"; Aldrington is a creative and stimulating place to be.'
- Key stage 2 pupils have the opportunity to learn a range of subjects to greater depth than younger pupils. In the best examples, they are applying their English and mathematics skills to enhance their work in other subjects, thereby improving the progress that they make. However, even more opportunities should be provided for pupils in key stages 1 and 2 to practise their English and mathematics skills in a wide range of subjects. Pupils in key stage 1 do not study the wide range of subjects in sufficient depth to make certain that they secure the best outcomes of which they are capable.
- You appreciate the value of school collaboration to share good practice and validate the strengths of the school. For example, as acting executive headteacher of St Bartholomew's School you have identified expertise to support your school in your drive to improve writing further.
- Governors are knowledgeable and bring a range of valuable expertise to the leadership of the school. They share leaders' resolve to forge improvement and are tenacious in their pursuit of seeking ways to be even more effective. Governors value the openness and transparency of information provided to them by school leaders which enables them to ask the right questions. Thus they provide significant challenge because they are clear about what the school does well and what could be even better. They are a dedicated team who are focused on the sustainability and growth of all aspects of the school's work, including school finances.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that information about what pupils already know and can do at the end of early years is used precisely by teachers to plan learning that meets the needs of all pupils as they start their learning journey into key stage 1
- raise pupils' achievement in writing further, by:
 - developing a whole-school approach to teaching writing to ensure that pupils build on their writing skills year after year

- persisting in seeking opportunities for pupils to apply what they have learned in English in a range of subjects
- continue to ensure that pupils' acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding in a wide range of subjects is of the same high standard as in English and mathematics, particularly in key stage 1
- develop the skills of middle leaders in using information available to them to pinpoint areas of school improvement as the school expands and the needs of pupils change.

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

Yours sincerely

Abigail Birch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the assistant headteachers and other leaders, those responsible for safeguarding, including the school business manager, and members of the governing body. I visited all classes in the school to observe pupils' learning with you and other leaders. I spoke to pupils during lessons, and met with a group of pupils formally to gather their views. No responses were made by pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I looked at their work in a range of subjects alongside subject leaders. I took account of 156 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 92 written contributions by parents. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. There were no responses made through the voluntary staff survey. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about the achievement of pupils, school policies and safeguarding procedures. I also discussed with you the evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

I focused on how effectively leaders, including governors, have continued to improve the school's effectiveness and addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. I examined the progress pupils have made from their variable starting points, especially focusing on key stage 1. I paid particular attention to writing because pupils achieved less well in this subject at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2016. I considered whether pupils, including the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged, make enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Also, I focused on the achievement of boys and girls across the school and whether leaders are targeting their efforts towards diminishing differences in their achievement. I chiefly made certain that boys were being encouraged to write so that more of them reach a good level of development by the time they leave early years. In addition, I evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding and how well the school supports families of pupils who have too many days off school.