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8 March 2016

Mrs Teresa Selvey
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Selvey

Short inspection of St Louis Catholic Academy

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2010.

This school continues to be good.

This is a school which, whilst it remains good, is now well on its journey to becoming outstanding. This is because you and other senior leaders are highly ambitious for the school and all its pupils. You are highly reflective, openly identifying where the school is currently strong and where it needs to improve further. You have created a cohesive staff team who work together very effectively and who feel valued and supported in their professional development. You have established a culture where staff are highly engaged in professional discussions and provide support for each other to improve their skills further.

At the time of the last inspection, the school's oldest pupils were in Year 4. Since then, the school has expanded so that you now have pupils from Nursery to Year 6. In expanding, you have maintained a very strong sense of community throughout the school which reflects the school's Catholic ethos. This Catholic ethos permeates the work of the school. The school is also highly inclusive and welcoming of pupils from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths. Respect for everyone is a key feature of the school and is demonstrated in how staff and pupils treat each other at all times. Pupils told the inspector that new pupils to the school are always welcomed and quickly settle, becoming part of the St Louis family.

Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about all aspects of the school. They feel valued and cared for by all staff. This is shown by one pupil's comment to the inspector, that 'everyone has a voice and every voice is heard'. Pupils interviewed during the inspection were keen to highlight the many aspects of school that they enjoy, including sports activities, charity days and school trips. They told the inspector that teaching was good because pupils who struggle with aspects of learning are helped by teachers and those who find learning easier are challenged to learn more. Pupils also talked about how they are encouraged to help and support each other in lessons, and how well teachers listen to the pupils' needs. One pupil told the inspector, 'If a few children are really interested in something, the teachers put on a special club for you!'. This illustrates the highly positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils at St Louis.

The school has successfully addressed the issues identified at the previous inspection. Middle leaders now take greater responsibility for improving the subjects they lead. They write clear action plans and these have been effective in improving teaching and learning further. The school's appointment of a leader for disadvantaged pupils is a positive new development. The school's plans to provide greater opportunities for her to observe the additional support provided for these pupils will further strengthen her role and help her to be even more effective. Provision in the Nursery class, which was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection, is now good because the leader for early years provision has worked with her team to develop their skills.

Your determination to avoid complacency and strive for further improvements has resulted in teaching that is consistently good across the school and with particular strengths, for example in Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6 where teachers have very high expectations of pupils. You have made sure that the curriculum is interesting and engaging. You have looked for opportunities to develop pupils' thinking, for example through 'TASC' (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) days. During the inspection, pupils in Year 6 were talking about why people dream and exploring their question in a variety of different ways. Pupils were interested, committed and reflective as they considered how best to approach their question. These opportunities are helping pupils to develop learning skills that they are able to apply to other areas of the curriculum.

The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were highly positive about all aspects of the school. One parent commented, 'our children bounce into school each day'. Parents commented on the sense of community that is created at the school. While a small number of parents responded negatively to several statements, all parents who responded agreed that their child felt safe at school.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture in the school of keeping pupils safe and secure. One administrative error on the single central record was addressed during the inspection and all safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. The school website contains all the required information. Checks on staff working at the school are carefully carried out and recorded. Policies are reviewed annually and amended in the light of new guidance provided. Safeguarding training is fully up to date for all staff and staff understand the responsibilities they have to ensure pupils' safety. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and have trust in the adults in school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, including governors, are highly committed to making the school the very best that it can be. You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. In addition, you have ensured that the quality of education remains good with some features that are even better across the school. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have a range of skills that are used effectively to support the work of the school. They visit the school regularly and work with senior and middle leaders to evaluate the work of the school. However, there are some areas where they have not been provided with sufficient information to help them monitor the effectiveness of the school's work, for example, to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- The addition of Years 5 and 6 to the school has been well managed and standards at Key Stage 2 are high, particularly in reading and writing. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and the most able, make good progress because teachers have high expectations and structure lessons well. However, achievement in mathematics has not been as high as in reading and writing. This is because in some lessons pupils repeatedly practise the same calculation when they have already grasped it, instead of being given opportunities to apply their skills to mathematical problems. Leaders are aware of this and have clear plans in place to improve mathematics. Early evidence of the positive impact of the changes being brought in was seen in some classes during the inspection.
- Achievement in Key Stage 1 has risen to above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics, although in 2015 outcomes in writing were not as high as for reading and mathematics. The school has looked closely at the reasons for this and evidence in pupils' books seen during the inspection demonstrates that standards in writing this year will be higher.

- Leaders have worked effectively to improve the early years provision in the school and this has improved significantly since the previous inspection. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception has risen. Children make good progress in Nursery and Reception classes, including those who start with skills below those expected for their age, and those who have yet to learn to speak English. This is because tasks are well structured, there is a strong focus on developing communication skills and because tasks are tailored to pupils' needs and enthusiasms. For example, the teacher was aware that some boys were reluctant to attempt writing but love playing with cars and so had incorporated writing tasks into the car activity, which the boys happily took part in.
- As a staff team, you have worked hard to improve the quality of questioning and this has helped teachers to probe pupils' thinking more closely and has further improved the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Teaching is particularly strong in Years 2, 5 and 6, where teachers are highly skilled at providing the right level of challenge for pupils, and where expectations are high.
- Pupils' behaviour was identified as a strength of the school at the time of the last inspection. This remains the case and pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school. They concentrate well in lessons, and are extremely polite and keen to learn. They work cooperatively together and are very caring. One pupil interviewed during the inspection said, 'we acknowledge that everyone is different and they need to open up to their true colours'.
- Leaders have taken effective action, which has improved overall attendance this year, encouraging good attendance through rewards and following up non-attendance with individual parents. However, leaders are not tracking the attendance of groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils, closely enough. Achievement in some subjects such as history and geography is not as good as in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. In some classes, pupils are not expected to work to the same standard in these lessons and so make less progress. In addition, in some classes there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills within these subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- attainment and progress in mathematics at Key Stage 2 improve to the same high standard as those achieved in reading and writing
- pupils make more rapid progress in subjects such as history and geography
- more detailed information about some aspects of the school's work is provided to governors, such as the attendance of groups of pupils, to enable them to evaluate actions taken to address these.

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the senior leadership team and the leader for disadvantaged pupils. The inspector spoke to three members of the governing body. The inspector met with a small group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 and scrutinised the parental, pupil and staff responses to Ofsted's online survey. The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding, school development planning and pupils' outcomes. The inspector observed teaching and pupils' work was evaluated.