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Mrs Margaret Farrell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Farrell

Short inspection of Belfield Community School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 the 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.

Your resolute and aspirational leadership has taken the school from strength to strength. Aply supported by the deputy headteacher, your unrelenting pursuit of excellence has built a successful school which is at the heart of your local community. You and your staff make sure that every child and their family are made welcome when they join your school. Together you help your pupils and their families overcome any barriers to learning so that they can make the most of every lesson, every day. You have made sure that your high expectations are clearly communicated to everyone. Well-thought-out systems and procedures which you have put in place help your team to do their jobs well.

Everyone is rightly proud of their school. Your pupils look smart in their uniforms and take pride in their work. Your teachers work hard creating displays showcasing the pupils' best work, putting up useful hints and tips for learning around the classrooms and making sure that there are plenty of resources to help pupils with their learning. The school is calm and orderly. Pupils listen respectfully to adults and each other. Pupils settle to tasks quickly, take turns and share, making sure that everyone can get on with their work uninterrupted.

Your commitment to training makes sure that all your staff are continually improving their practice. They appreciate the support they get from you as they try out new ideas. As a result you and your team have a greater insight into what most helps your pupils with their learning so that you make best use of pupils' time in school.

Your determination to make sure every pupil succeeds is shared by governors and staff. You are highly ambitious for everyone and accept no excuses. Despite the challenges that many of your pupils and families face you insist that pupils are in school, on time, every day and that their conduct is exemplary at all times. However, as we discussed during my visit, not all the different groups of pupils achieve as well as the most successful and outcomes are not as strong in some subjects.

You, the deputy headteacher and middle leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Pupils find their teachers' feedback, including marking, helpful in improving their work. Teachers use the information they gather about pupils' learning when they are marking to help them monitor pupils' progress on a daily basis. This information helps them plan the next step in each pupil's learning precisely. The sharing of successful practice is at the heart of school improvement. Your teaching staff speak very highly of the positive impact of the 'lesson study' approach you have adopted. It is improving their teaching techniques and pupil progress. You introduced a scheme which has helped pupils develop a fluent, legible handwriting style. You recognise that there is more to do if pupils are to be able to write comfortably at length using a pen. More pupils are now achieving the higher levels by the end of Year 6. Nonetheless, you know that there is still room for improvement, particularly in writing, and so have ensured that this remains a priority in your school improvement planning. Your teachers make sure that there are opportunities across the school day for pupils to practise their key skills in mathematics so that pupils secure their basic number facts.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that pupils' safety and well-being are paramount. They have kept all staff up to date with their training. The business manager has further strengthened systems to check the suitability of staff working with children. Safer recruitment training has been completed by governors and senior leaders. Leaders diligently follow up on all concerns, working in partnership with external agencies to support pupils and their families.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for. They are confident to speak to an adult in school if they are worried about anything.

Inspection findings

- Your honesty in evaluating the school's strengths and areas for improvement is commendable. You and your deputy headteacher have not shied away from the challenges faced in your ambition to create a school

which provides the best possible education for every child in your community.

- You have made sure that everyone shares your vision. You have secured the confidence and support of governors, staff and parents. You recognise and value the key role every single person has in driving the school forward and make sure that you take the time to listen to their ideas.
- You and the deputy headteacher have developed an assessment system that supports teachers in their planning, motivates pupils to achieve, helps parents to understand how well their children are getting on and helps leaders to swiftly address any underperformance. Teachers are unanimous in their verdict that the system helps them to do their jobs better, as they use the information well to plan pupils' next steps in learning. Pupils enjoy keeping track of their learning using their individual 'Maths Passports', 'Writing Journeys' and 'Roads to Reading'.
- You and your team focus on teaching reading, writing and mathematics. However, you have not lost sight of the importance of your pupils learning about the world around them. During my visit we saw pupils finding out about the different time zones around the world, the story of the Last Supper and making prototypes of puppets with moving parts. Your teachers told me how they plan topics which not only capture pupils' interests, particularly the boys, but also open up opportunities to further develop literacy and numeracy skills.
- As we discussed during my visit it is proving a challenge to maintain consistently high standards across all subjects and for all groups of pupils over time. You have, quite rightly, been focusing on making sure that standards in writing are improving across the school. I was impressed by the quality of work in pupils' books and displayed in classrooms. During this time, your high standards in reading and mathematics started to dip. You quickly spotted this trend and have put in place actions which should resolve this.
- Pupils as well as staff have been finding out about why some groups do not do as well as others. Your teachers have already looked at the curriculum, choosing topics which will appeal more to boys, igniting their passion for learning. We talked about how you could help disadvantaged pupils and boys get off to a flying start in early years so that they are ready for the demands of key stage 1, building on this firm foundation as they move through school. You hope that this will support them in keeping up with their peers.
- Older pupils enjoyed telling me about their favourite memories of school. They appreciate the wealth of opportunities you provide for them to explore the world around them. They recalled travelling by boat for the first time on a ferry trip across the River Mersey, overcoming their fears on the high-wire during their residential trip and seeing the exotic animals at Blackpool Zoo. They liked taking part in the football, art and cross-stitch clubs.
- Your middle leaders are flourishing. They are embracing the opportunity you have given them to take on more responsibilities across the school. As a team, they are highly motivated to contribute to the school's drive to be outstanding. Your trust in their leadership skills has encouraged them to

take risks and innovate as they find out what works best for your pupils.

- You make sure staff are held to account for their roles in school improvement, setting challenging performance management targets. You use this process well, giving everyone a chance to be fully involved in shaping the future of Belfield.
- You have developed an outward-facing school embracing the opportunities to bring new ideas through your membership of the 'Inspirational Professional Learning Community Network'. Newly qualified teachers as well as middle leaders speak highly of how these links have improved their practice. You make sure that time is not wasted with anything which does not fit in with your plans.
- Learning is the golden thread running through your school. Your three simple rules make sure pupils are ready to learn, your 'Learning Powers' help pupils develop the attributes they need to be successful learners and classrooms are filled with a wealth of resources to help pupils; for example, teacher-modelled writing, hints and tips for mathematics and word banks to help pupils with technical vocabulary for the different topics they are studying.
- Governors have made sure that they can better lead the school in its pursuit of excellence. They have identified the experience and expertise they need to provide effective support and challenge, using this information to plan their reconstitution. This leaner, fit-for-purpose governing body has made business more manageable and ensured a greater involvement by each member.
- You place high value on your partnership with parents in education. Your early years team get to know children and their families before they start at the school. Leaders reach out to offer support to parents who are facing challenges and teachers encourage families to attend the community library session for their child's class each week, so that they can enjoy reading together.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the achievement of all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and boys, is in line with their peers and pupils nationally and that all pupils perform consistently well across all subjects by:

- teachers in early years making certain that disadvantaged pupils and boys get off to the best possible start so that more of them achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception
- teachers across school ensuring that pupils in their classes achieve well across all subjects
- leaders carefully tracking the progress of all groups of pupils across all subjects, making sure that high-quality support is put in place swiftly so that pupils keep up with their peers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke to you and the deputy headteacher, members of the governing body and groups of staff including middle leaders and pupils. I also talked to a representative from the local authority and the school effectiveness partner. Together, we made short visits to lessons, during which I spoke to pupils and looked at the quality of their work. I also considered the views of 12 parents and 23 staff who completed online questionnaires. I reviewed your self-evaluation, as well as a range of other documentation. I also checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements and recruitment information.