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Mrs Jane Gornell
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Dear Mrs Gornell

Short inspection of St Benedict's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Under your leadership, the school continues to provide a nurturing, caring and family-centred environment. Pupils' safety, welfare and academic achievement are given high priority. Every child is recognised for their individual qualities and encouraged to succeed. Consequently, pupils grow into confident, ambitious youngsters who are well prepared for the next stage of their education and what life has to hold. You do not shy away from dealing with any shortcomings, and any underachievement is tackled with vigour. For example, an underperformance in the phonics screening check (assessing pupils' skills in linking sounds and letters) in 2015 was immediately addressed through training from educational consultants and support from yourself. The impact of your prompt action is reflected positively in the high percentage of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check this year. However, after observing the teaching of phonics during our learning walk, we both agreed that even more can be done to improve this standard. The organisation of the phonics teaching needs to be reviewed to ensure that all pupils receive the appropriate level of challenge, particularly the most able.

You have the full support of parents. The vast majority of parents who expressed a view, either to myself in conversation or online, are extremely positive about the school's work. They consider you to be a 'strong leader who deals with issues effectively'. The transition arrangements that the school has implemented to settle

children into the early years provision and onwards to their secondary education are described by parents as 'seamless'. They find the school's website, which is compliant with the Department for Education's requirements, a valuable source of information. Friday assemblies, where pupils celebrate their academic achievement, behaviour and attendance are popular events which parents enjoy attending. I believe that parents' high regard for you is illustrated in the following comment: 'I am thrilled and excited to have St Benedict's building the foundations of my child's education.'

You lead a team of staff who feel very proud to work in your school. Through your encouragement, support and mentoring, staff feel empowered to develop their roles in educating pupils. With regard to career progression, staff typically commented to me that 'coasting is not an option at this school'. As we toured the school, I saw pupils with happy, smiley faces who were keen to learn. Resources are of good quality and the learning environment enthuses pupils' passion for learning. The standard of behaviour that I observed during my time at your school was exemplary.

During a group discussion, pupils talked to me about their 'amazing' teachers and their own aspirations to become doctors, marine biologists and teachers. Many want to go on to university and told me: 'With the education I get here, I will make it.' Through my discussions with these pupils, I found that they enjoy and make good progress in a range of subjects, such as science, history and geography. The wide range of after-school clubs and exciting trips that your school provides are very popular and greatly appreciated by all pupils whom I spoke to. You ensure that pupils have a voice in the school, for example as elected members of the school council. In addition, pupils sit on the interview panel when the school is recruiting new staff.

Overall, areas for improvement identified at your previous inspection have been addressed successfully. Lessons now move at a snappier pace, ensuring that all pupils are quickly engaged in learning. Aspects of the school's work are now monitored with greater rigour, and lines of communication between the school and parents have improved considerably.

Safeguarding is effective.

Children feel, and are, safe in school. You and your governors ensure that all staff have completed relevant safeguarding training, including about their responsibilities in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. Staff with responsibility for safeguarding and recruitment have also completed training at the appropriate level. As designated lead for safeguarding, you realise your duty to ensure that either you or your deputy are on the school premises at all times to deal with any safeguarding concerns. All staff have read part one of 'Keeping children safe in education'. Staff talked to me with confidence about all issues relating to safeguarding. They understand that anyone can make a safeguarding referral, and that it is their duty to inform the police if any girl is subject to female genital mutilation. A close eye is kept on the small number of pupils who are persistently absent from school, for

understandable reasons, to ensure that they are free from harm. Documentation relating to safeguarding, including case files, contains all the required information and is fit for purpose.

Pupils trust adults in your school and are not afraid to go to them should they have any worries or concerns. They told me that bullying at St Benedict's is a rare occurrence. However, should it occur, adults sort it out promptly and school records confirm that this is the case. Pupils clearly understand the importance of not sharing their log-in details or passwords with anyone when they are online. Filtering systems are in place to provide additional protection when pupils use the internet.

Inspection findings

- You provide effective leadership to the school and are crystal clear about what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further. These priorities are clearly set out in the school development plan and are regularly monitored and reviewed.
- You keep an eagle eye on the quality of teaching. Any underperformance is quickly challenged. Teachers appreciate the constructive feedback you give them from lesson observations, book scrutinies and learning walks. Teachers' targets are linked to school priorities and strong emphasis is put on training to ensure that teachers' knowledge and skills are up to date. The performance of teaching assistants is managed with the same rigour.
- Children enter the early years with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. However, the number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is growing. Baseline assessments for this group are not carried out in the pupils' home language. Consequently, we agree that this makes a like-for-like comparison difficult.
- From their starting points in the early years, children from all groups, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, make strong gains in their learning. The number achieving a good level of development continues to rise and is significantly above the national average. Published data in 2015 shows that, over time, this trend of strong gains in pupils' learning continues throughout key stage 1. You and I agree that progress in recent years at key stage 2 for middle attainers and the most able pupils in writing and mathematics has been exceptional.
- For a number of justifiable reasons, including more rigorous national testing, progress and attainment dipped at key stage 2 in 2016. Although disappointing, the wheels have been put in motion to address this underperformance promptly. However, we are in agreement that pupils, most notably those who learn quickly, are not being challenged enough to deepen their learning, particularly in mathematics and writing.

- Your school fosters pupils' love of reading well. Younger pupils confidently use their phonics knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. They read with expression and have a good awareness of book terminology. They are able to predict what might happen next in the plot, and discuss the types of books that they like and dislike. Although the school does not have a designated library, books are placed at strategic points around the school.
- While looking at examples of pupils' work in their books, I noted the good-quality marking in literacy and mathematics. However, at times, this quality marking is not reflected in the foundation subjects such as geography and history, where the application of the school's marking policy is not consistent. Marking in these subjects does not always deepen and extend pupils' subject knowledge, and literacy errors are, at times, not corrected.
- Although the number of disadvantaged pupils attending your school is low, careful consideration is given to ensure that the pupil premium money is spent wisely to break down any barriers to learning. The needs of all these pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are very quickly identified. The success of this is exemplified in published data which shows that at key stage 2 disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, perform better than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. Differences between these two groups of pupils are diminishing quickly at key stage 1.
- Collaborative working is a strength of the school. Under your leadership the school has developed successful partnerships with a number of institutions, such as All Hallows Catholic College, the Wilmslow Education Partnership and Manchester Metropolitan University. As a result of these partnerships, teachers from All Hallows College come into school to teach pupils Spanish and Mandarin. In addition, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, go to All Hallows College in Years 5 and 6 for teaching in a variety of subjects, such as English, mathematics, drama and art. Furthermore, your school has set up a 'hub', in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University, offering support to students doing a PGCE (postgraduate course in education) qualification.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics meets the needs of all pupils, including the most able
- all pupils, including the most able, are challenged in their learning, particularly in writing and mathematics
- baseline assessments are carried out in a pupil's home language
- teachers' feedback across subjects is in line with the school's marking policy.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, middle leaders and members of the governing body. I also had informal discussions with a group of parents, staff and pupils from Years 2 and 6 to seek their views of the school. I went on a tour of the school accompanied by you to see the learning that was taking place. I looked at examples of pupils' work, and observed their behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I reviewed a range of documentation including the single central record, the school development plan and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. I also took account of the responses to the Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, completed by parents.