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Mrs Michelle Holden
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Dear Mrs Holden

Short inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 October 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 since the last inspection. Leaders have ensured that this is a school where everyone tries their best. The parents and carers, pupils and staff who I spoke to during the inspection often used 'like a family' to describe St Bernadette's. The culture is summed up by a pupil who told me that the school is 'caring, friendly, positive, safe and welcoming'. The strong relationships that exist between pupils, teachers, parents and staff is obvious. Everyone is working together and learning is at the heart of what this school is about.

Since the last inspection, you are new in post and have established a leadership team that is single-minded in its drive to improve standards. Leaders have managed change well and have been successful in sustaining high staff morale through effective support and development. Staff feel valued and listened to and are proud to be working at the school. As one member of staff commented to me, 'I look forward to coming to work and being part of the pupils' personal, social and academic development.'

A particular strength of the school is the strong support and participation of parents in their children's learning. Leaders are very conscious of the need to keep parents informed and involved about all the recent developments in education that affect their children and have provided many sessions for parents such as those on mathematics, reading, writing and assessment. Importantly, parents told me that

they trust you and have confidence that their children will receive a good education at St Bernadette's.

The previous inspection identified the need for accelerated progress of the most able pupils in writing. It is evident that pupils are now given many opportunities to write in a sustained way and that the quality of writing is as good in other subjects across the curriculum as it is in English. The 2016 teacher assessment results showed that, by the end of key stage 2, pupils attained standards in writing that were well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who were able to write at greater depth was more than double the national average. This pattern was the same for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils are very well prepared to write because of the effective preparation they receive when they are in the early years. Pupils' writing skills are celebrated in displays around the school.

The progress that pupils have made in writing is proof that when an area for improvement is identified, leaders embrace it and are dogged in their determination to see it succeed. You have rightly identified that the achievement of the most able pupils needs to be further strengthened in reading. I listened to a number of key stage 1 pupils read and they were very fluent and showed an ability to read for meaning at a stage beyond their chronological age. This ability is not reflected in pupils' achievement in standardised tests and leaders have already begun to rectify this. Reading is encouraged and promoted at every opportunity. A significant amount of money has been spent on creating and resourcing a library, pupils act as library assistants and the recently introduced tracking system allows teachers to identify pupils who are falling behind. Appropriate actions are put in place to ensure that they catch up.

The curriculum enables pupils to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills but also enriches them in their understanding of the world, different cultures and beliefs and in what it means to be British. The values we promote, for example democracy, are put into practice by pupils through the opportunities they have to be elected to the school council, the role of head boy and girl or to be a house captain. There are many extra-curricular activities that are on offer to the pupils and these help develop pupils musically, artistically, creatively and physically. Pupils also learn about other faiths and religions and are excited about what new things they are going to learn when they study Diwali. The work that pupils have already undertaken on different cultures is boldly displayed around the school.

Although achievement at key stage 2 and in the early years is typically above national averages, key stage 1 achievement is not as consistent. Leaders are aware of this and plans have already been put in place to make the necessary improvements. The strong leadership and effective teaching in key stage 1 is already bringing about faster progress across a range of subjects, not just English and mathematics.

Governors are unstinting in their dedication and passion for the school to be the best it possibly can be. They consider every child as if they were their own. Governors challenge and support you well and have had to make some difficult

decisions. However, the monitoring and evaluating aspect of the governors' role is not as sharp as it should be. This is because school improvement planning does not identify clearly defined objectives with specific actions, key milestones and measurable targets which are linked to pupil outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

The policies and procedures in place ensure that the safety and welfare of pupils is everyone's first priority. Pupils are involved in the promotion of the positive safeguarding culture that exists at the school. For example, pupils have the opportunity to be part of the online safety team. The pupils I spoke to show a very good understanding of how to keep safe and what to do if ever they felt worried or concerned about their own safety or that of others.

The pupils also demonstrated a good awareness of the risks of being drawn into unsafe situations and mind sets that could be harmful and they knew the importance of raising any concerns to a trusted adult.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, the most able pupils made significant progress in their writing. This was also the case for middle ability pupils. As we discussed, the progress that the most able pupils made in their reading was not as good as it should have been. Likewise, pupils in key stage 1 did not achieve what they were capable of in reading.
- Across all year groups, pupils are making good progress in mathematics.
- Although the number of disadvantaged pupils at the school is very small, the difference between how well they achieve compared with non-disadvantaged pupils is smaller than that found nationally.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the early years is above the national average and continues to improve. This strong performance is continued in Year 1 and the proportion of pupils who attain the expected standard in phonics is also well above the national average.
- As we discussed, the standards reached by pupils in key stage 1 are close to national averages and are inconsistent with the stronger achievement that is evident in the early years and by the end of key stage 2.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well at this school. This is particularly the case in reading and mathematics and is as a result of the effective teaching and support that they receive.
- The new assessment system that you have introduced is allowing leaders and teachers to track pupils' progress with precision and is allowing teachers to intervene where needed in a timely manner.
- Leaders' records of the quality of teaching and learning indicate that teaching is never less than good; the learning walk I conducted with you supports this view.
- The attendance of pupils is similar to the national average. The number of

pupils who are persistently absent is low.

- The pupils are very polite and friendly. Pupils' behaviour is good and the records that leaders keep are accurate and demonstrate that appropriate action is taken when any incidents of poor behaviour occur.
- The pupils I spoke to were confident that any incidents of bullying would be dealt with very quickly. Leaders keep robust records of such incidents.
- The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are evident in the school's mission and values, policies and practices. As discussed, governors are in the process of preparing a discrete equalities policy.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils achieve as well as they should in reading
- pupils' achievement is consistently above national averages across all key stages
- school improvement planning is precise in terms of how success will be measured.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you, senior leaders, eight members of the governing body and I was able to speak to a representative of the local authority and the director of education from the diocese. With you I conducted a learning walk and visited all classes and had the opportunity to speak to pupils and see their work. I met with a group of pupils during the day and I was able to listen to a number of pupils read. I spoke with a number of parents at the school gates and took account of 53 free text comments and 57 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents. There were 11 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 26 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I also scrutinised your assessment information, school improvement planning, behaviour and attendance logs, a number of case studies, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.

I considered in detail a number of questions:

- How well do leaders ensure that the pupils achieve as well as they should, especially the most able in writing?
- How effectively do governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities?
- How effectively are pupils prepared for modern life in Britain?
- How effective is key stage 1 provision in building on the strengths of the early years and preparing the pupils for key stage 2?
- How effective is safeguarding at the school?