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Mr Liam Anderson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Anderson

Short inspection of St Benedict's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. St Benedict's Catholic Primary School is a happy school, which is at the heart of the community, striving to enrich the lives of all.

Since you arrived in September 2016, you have established a clear vision for the school, building on previous success and strengthening the school further. Your energy, passion and determination to continue to improve the school are tangible. You have instilled clarity of purpose, a renewed energy among staff and high expectations for pupils. Most parents who took part in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive about the school and all would recommend the school to others. Furthermore, parents with whom I spoke on my visit were extremely positive about the school, especially about the improvements in communication since you arrived at the school.

You are supported extremely well by your staff at all levels. They have a clear drive and collective vision for making the school the best they possibly can. Your leadership team is skilled and knowledgeable about effective learning methods and have very high expectations of themselves, other members of staff and the pupils.

On your arrival you quickly evaluated what the next steps should be and wrote a very clear and detailed development plan, with a clear set of priorities. Your choice of priorities was accurate.

The pupils are friendly and positive about their learning and the school. As one pupil told me, 'Teachers always make the lessons fun. The lessons are never boring.' This energy and positive attitude were clear to see when visiting classrooms throughout the school, and this was particularly evident when I looked in some of the key stage 2 pupils' writing books. These books are full of beautiful well-crafted writing, where there is a clear sense of pupils' pride in what they do. Also, when I spoke with pupils, they were particularly positive about all the enrichment activities that the school offers.

Since the previous inspection, teaching over time remains good. The teaching of mathematics has been a particular strength and often pupils' standards in mathematics are higher than the national average. This was particularly noted in 2016, where the proportion of Year 6 pupils who attained the expected standard for their age was well above the national average.

Your leaders have concentrated on improving the teaching of writing. Through strong and effective guidance from the English subject leaders, I am pleased to see pupils' attainment, especially at the end of key stage 2, improving. I can see that writing is becoming another strength of the school's work, but you are right to continue with writing as one of the priorities for improvement.

The areas for improvement mentioned in the last inspection report have been addressed well. Pupils' presentation of their work is now at a high standard, especially in their writing books. They are responding well and improving their work as a result of their teachers' feedback. Leaders' improvement plans are clear and planned actions are measurable. However, you are aware, and we did discuss, that you and other leaders still need to ensure that more pupils attain higher standards, especially at the end of key stage 2.

Governors are clear about the school's priorities and are skilled in holding you and your staff to account. They have a balance of skills and have recently undergone a skills audit. The governing body is rightly proud of the pupils and holds them in high regard. A governor told me, 'St Benedict's children are a strength in our wider community.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is robust. You have a large team of senior leaders, governors and administration staff, which supports you in keeping pupils safe and in maintaining a strong safeguarding culture. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Staff training is regular and up to date. Recently, Warrington Borough Council

undertook a safeguarding audit of your school, which has supported you in writing an action plan. Briefings, updates and reminders about safeguarding are held weekly for senior staff and governors. Pupils feel safe at school and as pupils told me, 'There is no place in school where we feel unsafe. Other children are sensible and teachers always sort the problems out.' Almost all parents feel that you keep pupils safe and cared for well.

Your safeguarding governor provides accurate and timely support and challenge. The governors are keen to continue to provide a safe and secure site, and talked with me about the school's next steps.

Inspection findings

- You have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and the areas for development. Your self-evaluation and development documents are honest and clear. The documents highlight priorities for improvement well. Improvements have been made in development planning since the school's previous inspection.
- By the end of key stage 2, those pupils who are capable do not always go on to attain the higher standards in reading and writing. This is not the case in key stage 1 because the proportion of pupils attaining at the higher standards in reading and mathematics is above average. Leaders have been aware of the relative weaknesses in key stage 2 and have implemented strategies to raise standards. Improvements in accuracy assessment in mathematics and the new approaches to teaching writing are beginning to have a positive effect. Also, it is clear that this is a priority of all subject leaders. In addition, a lower than average proportion of those middle-attaining pupils by the end of key stage 1 go on to attain the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- A key line of enquiry for this inspection was to see how effectively writing is taught across the school. The teaching of writing is well planned and there is a clear whole-school approach. The leader responsible for overseeing the outcomes of, and provision for, pupils' writing has implemented effective new strategies for teaching, learning and assessment. Current Year 6 pupils use a good range of writing skills and their presentation is excellent. In addition, pupils consistently take ownership for the improvement of their own writing and respond well to teachers' feedback. In 2016, an above-average proportion of pupils at key stages 1 and 2 achieved the expected standard for age in writing. However, very few pupils attained the higher standards for their age.
- There are differences in the achievement of boys and girls in the early years. In 2016, more than double the number of girls reached a good level of development than boys. The leader of the early years provision has a clear vision and understanding of the needs of children. The recent improvements made to the outdoor learning area are beginning to have a positive effect on learning, especially for the boys. During the inspection, I saw that there was a clear focus on activities and approaches to inspire the boys to learn. Current assessments show that boys are making good progress this year.
- A growing strength of St Benedict's is the quality of leadership shown by you and

your leaders across the school. In particular, leaders are constantly improving systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning across the school, and on how the pupils are progressing.

- The information that you gather about pupils' progress is thorough. All leaders use it to identify which pupils or groups of pupils are making progress and who need additional support and challenge. Termly pupils' progress meetings enable teachers to reflect on and discuss pupils' learning with senior leaders and to discuss how they could adapt their teaching to further meet pupils' needs. Recent changes to your checking systems have enabled you to keep a closer eye on the progress of the different groups of pupils.
- Attendance has typically been below the national average. There is a robust approach to dealing with pupils' absence from school. There is a 'collective pride' approach around attendance, ably led by you. Leaders show the positive impact they have had on the attendance of individual pupils. However, attendance is still below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the school increases the proportion of the most able pupils attaining the higher standards throughout the school, particularly in writing for boys
- the school increases the proportion of pupils, who have achieved the expected standards for their age in reading and writing at the end of Year 2, who go on to attain the higher standards at the end of Year 6
- attendance improves so that it is at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Howard Bousfield
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, subject leaders and four members of the governing body. I also spoke with the school improvement partner and archdiocese representative. Together we conducted a learning walk, visited all classes, and had the opportunity to speak with pupils and see their work. I also listened to a number of pupils read. I met with a group of pupils, spoke with a number of parents at the school gates and took account of parents' comments. There were 34 responses to Parent View. I scrutinised your assessment information, school improvement planning, the single central record, and other safeguarding procedures and practices.