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Mrs Melanie Ravenscroft
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Dear Mrs Ravenscroft

Short inspection of St Aidan's CofE Primary School Billinge

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is because you and your staff reflect carefully on your practice. You identify accurately what improvements you need to make and draw up precise plans to bring them about. You then check regularly on the impact of the changes made and make further adaptations in the light of your findings. A central element in this process is your consultation with pupils.

Following the last inspection, you placed considerable emphasis on improving the standards of writing in the school. Although the standards improved, pupils said that they were finding writing rather boring and your review of their work showed that, although their writing was increasingly technically correct, it lacked flair. In response to this, you provided each class with high-quality reading books that could be used as stimuli for writing. As a result, pupils' interest grew and their writing became more imaginative. You also worked very closely with pupils on revising the anti-bullying policy. As a result, they have clear 'ownership' of it. However, in its present form, it makes no mention of racist and homophobic bullying.

You have worked very closely with parents to improve attendance. This is leading to improvements overall. However, your understanding of how well specific groups of pupils are attending is less clear. The school's website is accessible and interesting but contains only limited information about the use of pupil premium and sports funding.

Your curriculum is broad and balanced. However, there is insufficient focus on ensuring progression and continuity in subjects other than English and mathematics. You recognise the need to focus more on progression in other subjects and have planned to provide staff with the time to re-examine and revise the schemes of work for these subjects.

The governors are closely involved in the school, have a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development and provide appropriate challenge, as well as support, for you and your staff.

Morale in the school is high. The responses of staff to the online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive, as were those of parents, every one of whom would recommend the school to another parent. The parents to whom I spoke were highly complimentary about the school, with several commenting on its 'nurturing family' atmosphere; on how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given particularly good support; and how teachers 'go above and beyond' to help the pupils.

The pupils whom I met were also full of praise about the way that staff provide additional help for anyone who finds the work difficult. They all enjoy coming to school and they highlighted a number of things they particularly like, including the opportunities for reflection and prayer and the way that kindnesses are recognised. Pupils behave very well around the school and, in lessons, the great majority respond well to the lively and enthusiastic presentations by the teachers and the wide range of activities made available to them.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your records are up to date and detailed.

The school's teaching programme covers all relevant aspects of safeguarding, including how to keep safe on the internet. This is supplemented by presentations from visitors and attendance at 'road shows' on how to combat cyber bullying. The work of the counsellor is also an important aspect of your provision.

The pupils to whom I spoke all said that they feel safe in school and on the way to and from school. They also said that bullying is rare and, when it does occur, is dealt with promptly and successfully. All pupils receive swimming lessons so that they can keep themselves safe near water. They are also taught how to keep safe on roads, near railway lines and when using electrical equipment. Fire practices take place regularly and the pupils know precisely what to do in the case of a fire. They know whom to go to if they have any worries and are confident that they will be helped.

You and your staff work closely and effectively with external agencies to provide additional support for pupils and families who are facing particular difficulties. You know the pupils well and monitor their welfare very carefully.

Inspection findings

- The previous inspection report identified the need to raise achievement in writing. You and your colleagues have been very rigorous in tackling this issue. You have revised your schemes of work to give greater prominence to writing in English lessons and in other subjects. Staff have received specific training and the improvement of pupils' writing is a performance management target for every teacher. The positive impact of all this hard work was evident in the lessons and individual support sessions observed, when the pupils responded to their teachers with enthusiasm to develop an understanding of the principles of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Work in books also showed how pupils are able to write for a range of purposes in a variety of subjects. In history, for example, a letter, supposedly written by a soldier in the Gallipoli campaign, showed how well the pupil was able to balance descriptions of events at the front with recollections of home and to convey humour as well as fear of what was to come. In geography, pupils had drawn up a number of questions about life in Britain and in Kenya and had produced well-researched and well-constructed arguments for and against living in either country. Hitherto, you have provided clear models on which pupils can base their writing. Now that they have developed the stamina to write at length, you are encouraging them to shape the writing themselves.
- In response to the last inspection, you have provided opportunities for teachers to share effective practice with each other and with staff in other schools. This has been particularly successful in the case of early years provision. In 2016, the proportion of early years pupils reaching a good level of development fell below the national average. With the aid of staff from a local teaching school, you conducted a rigorous review of provision and drew up an action plan for improvement. The governors also employed an additional teacher to provide extra support for specific pupils. As a result, children in the early years are now making good progress, as your own analysis shows.
- In 2015, attendance was in the lowest 10% nationally for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Last year, persistent absence was in the highest 10% nationally for pupils eligible for free school meals. To tackle this, the governors have bought in additional support from the local authority's education welfare service. You have introduced contracts for parents whose children are persistently absent. You also provide rewards for good attendance or significant improvements in attendance. Attendance has improved for some pupils. You do not currently monitor the attendance of specific groups of pupils. You agreed that it would be helpful to do this.
- For a number of years, your pupils' performance in national tests and their progress over time have been significantly better than the national averages. Last year, the performance of Year 6 pupils was not as good. You conducted a very detailed study to find the reasons for this. They were mainly to do with the nature of that particular group of pupils. Your analysis of current performance shows that pupils at key stages 1 and 2 are on track to do well again, although there is further work to be done to enable seven-year-olds to gain greater depth of learning in their writing.

- You make good use of the physical education and sports funding. The games lesson that I observed was well structured and enabled pupils to develop their skills systematically. The pupils to whom I spoke were very enthusiastic about the wide range of activities available to them. Your plans for the current year have not been published on the website. The same is true for the pupil premium funding, although it is clear from our discussions that this is being used appropriately and that pupils are making progress as a result. In the case of both sets of funding, you have not identified clearly enough what your intended outcomes are for pupils. Therefore, it is difficult to measure the precise impact of the provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- amend the anti-bullying policy to include specific reference to racist and homophobic bullying
- monitor the attendance of specific groups of pupils, especially those who are potentially vulnerable
- develop the website further, so that it includes more detailed information on the curriculum, pupil premium funding and the physical education and sports funding.

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

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you and your deputy and spoke to other members of staff. I met the chair and five members of the governing body and had telephone conversations with representatives of the Liverpool diocese and the local authority. I visited lessons with you to observe teaching. I discussed safeguarding with you and the leader of the safeguarding programme. I looked through pupils' work and met a group of eight pupils, chosen at random from Years 3 to 6. I reviewed the 12 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, the 101 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the eight responses to the staff survey. I also spoke to parents as they brought their children to school and read correspondence from parents.