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Dear Mrs Macdonald

Short inspection of St Mary and St Benedict Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 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 June 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 Mary and St Benedict is an inclusive school community. You, the governors and staff team are very committed to the school's core Catholic values. The school makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The whole school community, including pupils, their parents, parishioners and local residents, embrace and celebrate cultural diversity. As you rightly pointed out to me, pupils and their families can trace their heritage and backgrounds to nearly every continent across the world. Pupils are very proud of their school and what they achieve. As one group told me, 'The school really inspires us'. Pupils are exceptionally well behaved, polite and accepting of everyone, whatever their backgrounds, beliefs and abilities.

Pupils' enthusiasm for school is reflected in very good attendance. Many pupils told me that it is easy to make and keep friendships. They are very excited about the range of activities and events provided by the staff team. Most pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds and you were keen to impress on me the commitment you and the staff show to raising aspirations. This is clearly having a positive effect on the ambitions of your pupils. For example, pupils in Years 6 told me that their visit to Aston University in Birmingham sparked their interest and enthusiasm for science and now they want to be forensic scientists, aeronautical engineers or doctors when they are older. It is no surprise to see that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment in science are typically in line with national figures.

Pupils achieve well across the school in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged and the most able pupils. Test results show that pupils achieve particularly well in phonics, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Early literacy is taught well and the methods used by teachers and support staff to teach phonics are helping the youngest children in both the early years and key stage 1 to get off to an excellent start developing their reading and writing skills. There is now scope for further improvement as some children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 could be doing better. For example, when visiting classes I noticed that Reception children were making good progress in writing independently. However, at the time I discussed with you the probability that many of these children, according to assessments of their progress, have the potential to write independently sooner during the year. More robust and regular assessments would enable staff to identify children who are capable readers and writers earlier in the school year, ensuring that even more of them reach a good level of development in literacy.

Leaders and governors make sure that pupils who are in particular need receive weekly speech and language support from a specialist. Governors are very committed to this and ensure that resources are available for this important work as most children who join the school's Nursery or Reception Year start with speech and language skills that are well below those typically expected for their age. In addition, a large number of pupils across the school are in the very early stages of speaking English as an additional language to their home language. These pupils do well and quickly settle into school and converse in spoken English.

You and the staff provide a curriculum that encourages pupils to aspire and achieve. The school's curriculum has improved markedly since the previous inspection. There are positivity and vitality in the planned curriculum, which is having a good effect on pupils' academic and personal development. Examples of creative and performing arts are clearly portrayed around the school. Displays of pupils' work are of high quality so that all pupils can see the very best standards to aim for. Many examples of pupils' fine art and sculptures and written accounts of stories, literature and famous historical events, demonstrate well the good progress pupils make in science, art, humanities and literature. In addition, pupils thrive on the opportunities they have to learn to perform dance and drama, such as Shakespeare's 'Midsummer Night's Dream', or learn to play a musical instrument. You are successful in your determination that every child plays an instrument. All pupils learn to play the ukulele and the most talented musicians are encouraged to further specialise by learning to play the guitar or keyboard. I heard pupils' high-quality singing during the celebration assembly for St Benedict, one of the school's patron saints. Older pupils told me how the school's excellent choir enjoyed performing at the Albert Hall in London and Symphony Hall in Birmingham. These examples also illustrate very clearly the importance placed on the creative and performing arts and the high standards you expect from pupils, including in sport and when learning to speak Spanish.

You provide strong and effective leadership. Leaders have successfully monitored, trained and supported staff to maintain good teaching across the school. Another significant improvement has been the way that senior and middle leaders coach and mentor staff so that teachers and support staff can see and share good practice.

Assessments and pupils' progress rates in books show that the teaching is typically good and in some classes, especially in Years 5 and 6, there is some outstanding practice. The sustained improvement to standards in mathematics is now more consistent across year groups and classes. However, I noticed and shared with you some examples of work in mathematics books where there is still scope for further improvement. Pupils do not get enough opportunities to correct calculations or problem-solving errors when working independently. It is also the case that teachers and support staff do not consistently intervene to assess why pupils make mistakes. This makes it difficult for pupils to learn from their mistakes or pinpoint any gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a vigilant and effective culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders and governors review staff vetting procedures and policies systematically. The visitor checking-in system is efficient and robust. Teaching, support and administrative staff are well trained, including in areas such as the national 'Prevent' programme to protect pupils and families from extremism or radicalisation. Governors and staff carry out regular reviews of safeguarding and child protection policies and risk assessments of school activities and educational visits. The safety, security and well-being of children in the foundation stage are managed by well-qualified and skilled staff. All the parents that I spoke with, and those responding by questionnaire, email or text to Ofsted's regional office, agree that pupils are safe in school. Parents believe, and rightly, that their children are very well cared for by the staff.

Inspection findings

- All the parents I spoke with agree that you, the staff, governors and pupils clearly reflect the school's core values, 'Together with Christ everyone achieves more.' In addition, parents of different faiths and backgrounds told me that these values and the effective education provided for their children enables them to achieve well and mature into responsible citizens. Parents are right.
- The quality of teaching has improved well since the previous inspection. You and senior and middle leaders accurately monitor and evaluate learning in lessons and pupils' work in books. Staff feel strongly supported and this is reflected in their responses to the online staff questionnaire. Continued good teaching and rising standards clearly indicate strong leadership and effective oversight of the quality of teaching and learning.
- Last year's national assessments and current work and progress information show that pupils reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that compare favourably with national figures. Last year's national test results show that standards were in line with the national average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Building on this, current national assessments show that standards improved well compared with last year.

- For the third consecutive year, the vast majority of pupils reached the required standards in phonics in Years 1 and 2. The majority of children join the early years with skills and abilities, particularly in speech and language, that are well below those typical for their age. Pupils make good progress throughout key stage 1.
- Although standards were below average at key stage 1 last year, pupils made good progress in relation to their low starting points. This year's assessments show marked improvement compared to last year. This now needs to be sustained by ensuring that those pupils who reached the required standard in phonics also reach age-related standards in reading and writing by the end of Year 2.
- The current focus on improving children's speech and language skills, including specialist support provided weekly by a qualified therapist, is bearing fruit. Children in the early years are increasingly conversing and sharing ideas while they work with their classmates. This focus could be developed further.
- Although early years staff assess children's progress and development, there has not been sufficient focus on identifying, as soon as possible, those children who are ready for reading and writing during the school year. As in key stage 1, there is potential for more children to reach a good level of development in early literacy by checking and intervening sooner and providing more opportunities for children to read and write independently.
- We discussed how leaders and staff have improved the teaching of mathematics and pupils' achievement. This year's assessments show an uplift in the proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding age-related standards. The monitoring of books and of teaching by senior and middle leaders is helping teachers to plan and refine their teaching so it better matches pupils' abilities. For example, we observed some small groups during the inspection and found that pupils receive individualised and well-focused teaching, support and intervention when learning new mathematical skills and concepts.
- However, pupils' work in books shows that there is still room for improvement in mathematics. Some of the work shows that pupils make mistakes, but do not have enough opportunity to correct these. In addition, it is not always clear to the pupils why they make these mistakes. This means that teachers are not always pointing out or assessing where the gaps are in pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- sustain improvements to pupils' achievement in the early years and key stage 1 by:
 - building on the rapid progress pupils make in phonics so that more of them reach or exceed age-related standards in reading and writing by the

end of Year 2

- continuing to focus on improving children’s speech and language skills in the early years so that the proportion reaching a good level of development in early literacy by the end of Reception is closer to, or meeting, national figures
- build on the improvements to teaching and pupils’ achievement in mathematics by:
 - Checking and assessing what pupils know and understand in order to identify any gaps or misunderstandings in their learning
 - making sure pupils have time to correct mistakes in lessons so they can learn from these while they are fresh in their minds.

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

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Information about the inspection

In addition to meeting with you and the two teachers responsible for managing English and mathematics, I met with the chair of the governing body and a foundation governor. You and I visited parts of lessons in all classes, including the early years. I scrutinised samples of pupils’ work in books during visits to lessons. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day to seek their views about the school. I also considered the views of eleven parents and carers who responded to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View. I also reviewed the small number of parents’ comments sent to Ofsted during the inspection by text or email. I spoke to teaching, clerical and support staff and reviewed the 17 responses from staff to the online Ofsted questionnaire. I spoke to many pupils during lessons and had lunch with a group to discuss their views about the school. I discussed by telephone the local authority’s assessment of the school’s effectiveness with one of its improvement advisers. I analysed the results from the most recent national tests and current national and teacher assessments. I scrutinised and discussed with you the school’s self-evaluation and the school’s improvement plans. I met with a group of older pupils in the afternoon to discuss their work in books and seek their views about the school. I checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures to determine whether the school’s arrangements for safeguarding are effective.