

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 December 2017

Mrs Claire Smyth
Headteacher
Beckers Green Primary School
Beckers Green Road
Braintree
Essex
CM7 3PR

Dear Mrs Smyth

Short inspection of Beckers Green Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 November 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You took up your position as headteacher in 2016, appointing many new members of staff. Only four teachers have remained at the school since 2013. You and your new deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), work extremely effectively as a team. The English subject lead, the early years lead, and the new leads for key stages 1 and 2 have all quickly become confident and competent in their roles.

Despite some challenging times, including having to take a careful look at the school's budget, it is to your credit that the whole staff are very supportive of your vision. 'Be challenged, be inspired, be you' is evident throughout the school and particularly among the pupils.

The pupils at the school are a delight. There is a real 'buzz' of purpose in Beckers Green 'hive of learning'. From the minute the pupils enter the building, they are eager to start their day, many attending the breakfast club. Pupils are equally keen to begin their learning and describe their school as 'amazing and incredible'. It is easy to see why. Teachers plan learning that is exciting. If it is not 'fishing for numbers' with magnets in the early years, it is building model Anglo-Saxon houses, writing an advertisement for a religious leader to help pupils 'master' religion or exploring the outdoors in the copse.

Pupils are offered a wealth of experiences all underpinned by a real sense of belonging to the 'family' that is the school. You and your staff have created an environment where pupils feel safe to push themselves and get things wrong, secure in the knowledge that adults will help them. The mantra is 'I can do it, if I try'. Try they do, by often choosing the 'go' or 'turbo' challenges that teachers provide.

Polite and courteous pupils hold open doors for adults and routinely ask 'How are you?' Pupils are proud to undertake their responsibilities as school council members or play leaders because 'we like to help and make people happy'. One parent among several who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said of the school, 'This is a lovely school with a friendly atmosphere where each child is treated as an individual.'

The previous inspection report asked the school to improve children's early speaking, reading, writing and mathematical skills in Reception. You have sought support from the local authority and have made considerable changes since the previous inspection. You and the new early years leader have worked hard to ensure that the Reception classes have a lively and stimulating environment to play and learn in. All the adults guide children sensitively as they play. As a result, children settle well, confidently playing on their own or with others.

From an often very low baseline, children in the early years make good progress and have achieved a good level of development which has been broadly in line with the national average for the last three years. We saw children independently and collaboratively reading, counting, writing and talking animatedly with their classmates about the instruments they were playing. They have come on in leaps and bounds particularly in their communication, language and literacy skills because every activity encourages children to talk about their learning. The work that you have done to engage parents in their children's learning is clearly having an impact. Parents really like being able to contribute to their children's learning and sharing their children's daily experiences with them. One parent said, 'When we do something at home, my son tells me to make sure I put it online for the teacher to see!'

The other area that the school was asked to improve on in the previous inspection was attendance. You are relentless in your pursuit of good attendance for all pupils. The very able attendance officer provides you with accurate and timely information which highlights any patterns of poor attendance. These are effectively addressed. A whole raft of initiatives are in place to both challenge and support families so that pupils, especially the most vulnerable, attend school regularly. You and your team will stop at nothing to ensure that families are given tailored support, be this from yourselves or from external agencies. You showed me many examples of where this has had an impact both on pupils' readiness for school and, ultimately, on their regular attendance.

You know, however, that there is still work to be done particularly with the growing group of disadvantaged pupils. You benefit from huge support from the governing

body in challenging lateness and poor attendance. Together you are making a difference. The commitment that you have to this important area of the school's work is shared by all staff. Pupils said they love to receive the awards they get if they make it into the '98% club'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View agree that their children are safe and well looked after at school. You should be proud of comments by parents such as 'Super school, super staff. Both my children are very happy here.' This sentiment is also reflected in the overwhelmingly positive staff survey. All staff who responded are proud to work at Beckers Green.

You have created a culture of care and vigilance and are passionate about ensuring that pupils, and indeed their parents, feel safe, both physically and emotionally. You 'will not shy away from anything to ensure that pupils get what they need and deserve'. You and your SENCo are tenacious in following up any concerns you have about pupils with their families or with external agencies. Record-keeping is meticulous and charts well any concerns from staff, actions taken and ongoing monitoring.

You continue to work very closely with specialist teachers, alternative provisions and other professionals to ensure that the rising proportion of pupils with complex needs, and those who are disadvantaged, are supported in the best way possible. For example, the work that the pastoral support officer does within the nurture group is much appreciated by pupils. This and all manner of other initiatives that you have put in place have had a considerable impact on pupils' attendance and their mental health. Consequently, and particularly for some disadvantaged pupils, progress is good and their readiness to learn vastly improved. The further impact has been on families. As one parent said, 'I know the door is always open for me to come in and talk to any teacher and the head or deputy head.'

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we agreed that I would explore how well phonics and reading are taught across the school. This was because the achievement of Year 1 pupils in the phonics screening check has been below the national average for at least three years. Progress in reading has also fluctuated over a number of years at the end of key stage 2. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in reading in key stage 1 has also been below the national average for some years.
- You made reading a whole-school priority during the last year. This clearly has had an impact. Reading in 2017 at the end of key stage 2 saw a rise in pupils' progress, including those who are disadvantaged, to above the national average. This is an improvement on 2016. The results for the end of key stage 1 also show that the school is increasing the numbers of pupils achieving the national expected and higher standards, albeit slowly.

- Pupils say they love reading. As one said, 'It keeps me calm. I can picture what is happening and it feels like it is happening to me.' I can see how this focus on reading is influencing pupils' writing which is of high quality and displayed with prominence throughout the school.
- Following a review last year of phonics, you took the decision to alter the way that you teach phonics at Beckers Green. Rather than splitting pupils between various classes, each teacher now teaches phonics to their own class. Your monitoring and early indications show that this is having a positive impact. The proportion of current Year 1 pupils, for example, who will reach the expected standard at the end of this academic year, looks set to be nearer the national average from a lower baseline than in 2016.
- You know that there is still some way to go to ensure that the teaching of phonics is consistently effective throughout the early years and key stage 1. In this endeavour, you have embarked on a local authority phonics project that will start in January, raising the profile of phonics within the school with a particular emphasis on boys.
- The second area that we agreed to focus on was how well additional funding is used to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This was because, over a period of years, disadvantaged pupils have not attained as well as they could. Many of those who are disadvantaged also have SEN and/or disabilities, some of which are complex.
- You and your SENCo are relentless in ensuring that each pupil has the support that they need. You have worked tirelessly with specialist teachers, external agencies and other schools. You have ensured that your staff have had appropriate training to enable them to effectively address the needs of each pupil. As one parent said, 'The school aims to include every child in all activities where possible and does not exclude anybody.' As a result, these groups of pupils currently in the school make good progress which is similar to that of their peers in reading, writing and mathematics.
- A growing number of pupils who come to Beckers Green are disadvantaged. This has not phased you or your staff. Instead you have sought to better understand the barriers that some pupils and families face, and to seek solutions. Following rigorous self-evaluation, you have thought 'outside the box', often resulting in innovative projects. For example, you worked collaboratively with other schools to provide a summer camp specifically for disadvantaged pupils which was very popular. The camp will be repeated again this year.
- Your governors also took a very proactive stance. They put together a 'moral, cultural and communication committee' to specifically look at how governors can support parents. The membership of the committee is largely parent governors who reach out to other parents to encourage them to become more involved in their children's education. As a result, for example, over 95% of parents this year came to the early years open afternoons.
- Teaching, work in books and scrutiny of the school's own assessment information show that disadvantaged pupils are making at least good progress in reading,

writing and mathematics. You are able to demonstrate many occasions when individual pupils have made considerable progress from their starting points.

- By the end of Year 6 in 2017, the difference in progress between this group of pupils and those nationally had closed in reading and writing. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was also closer to the national average. This is because you and your committed staff go to great lengths to support these pupils so that they are ready to learn.
- The pastoral support officer, work in the nurture group and bespoke specialist support have had a considerable impact on pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning. Disadvantaged pupils whom I spoke to were clear that they could achieve anything with the support of adults in the school. They had aspirations to be a police officer, coast guard, nurse or explorer. They had total belief in themselves because all your staff show a total belief in them.
- The final area that we agreed we would look at was how well science is taught across the school. This is because attainment in science at the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2 in 2016 was below the national average. Once again, those who attained the least were the disadvantaged pupils.
- In 2017, attainment in science at the end of key stage 2 rose to be broadly in line with the national average. It is clear from your curriculum information on the website and in the school that science is taught both as a separate subject and, when appropriate, as part of 'topics' or themes. During the inspection, we saw examples of pupils, including those who were the most able, demonstrating good subject knowledge and skill development.
- Teachers plan science activities that all pupils can access, often providing practical activities – for example, exploring rocks, experimenting with finding out which metals attract magnets, seeing which materials are good insulators, blowing through straws to see the effect this might have on fire for their Great Fire of London topic or debating which bit of a flower is brightly coloured to attract bees. The good quality of pupils' work in their books and on the many displays is well supported by teachers' subject knowledge.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- phonics teaching is consistently good so that the majority of pupils reach the expected standard by the end of Year 1
- the progress of disadvantaged pupils is accelerated to diminish the difference from that of other pupils nationally
- every effort is made to continue to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, governors and office staff to discuss safeguarding, attendance and aspects of school leadership and management.

Together with you and your deputy headteacher, I observed learning in the majority of classes, talked with pupils about their learning and heard pupils read during lessons.

Your English and mathematics leaders and I scrutinised pupils' work in their books from a random selection of disadvantaged and higher-attaining pupils from across the school.

I spoke with you and your deputy headteacher about safeguarding arrangements and assessment information. We viewed information about child protection, records of referrals to social care and actions that followed.

I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation, development plan and minutes of governing body meetings, and spoke on the telephone to a representative of the local authority.

I took account of the 26 responses from parents to Parent View, 10 of which were by text. I also considered the survey responses from 39 pupils and 18 staff.