

25 January 2018

Mr Mike Smart
Headteacher
Beeches Junior School
Beeches Road
Great Barr
Birmingham
West Midlands
B42 2PY

Dear Mr Smart

Short inspection of Beeches Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your strong leadership provides clear purpose and direction for the school. You took up the position of headteacher in September 2015 and successfully addressed some inconsistencies that had arisen in the quality of teaching. Your capable and knowledgeable leadership team has been an essential ingredient in this journey of success. You work well together because you are forward-thinking and ambitious to get the best for pupils. Leaders and governors skilfully and accurately evaluate the effectiveness of the school. This provides good capacity for further improvement.

Relationships between pupils, staff and parents and carers are extremely positive. Staff take time to get to know the pupils as individuals. As a result, pupils feel valued and they love coming to school. You worked with the school community to refine the school motto 'Aspire, believe, strive, achieve'. The motto is clearly evident in pupils' behaviour and in the ethos of the school. Pupils enjoy learning and work hard in lessons.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education that their children receive. You and the staff ensure that parents are a central part of the school's work. Comments from parents included 'My child is thriving; I could not be happier' and 'Relationships are superb and communication is excellent.'

You and other leaders have responded successfully to areas for improvement from the previous inspection report. Leaders carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching and the work in pupils' books. These checks provide teachers with precise feedback on how to improve their teaching. This good-quality feedback, combined with regular training, ensures that staff are successfully supported to refine their practice. Leaders and staff work cohesively in order to keep improving learning in the classroom for pupils.

The quality of teaching in mathematics has improved since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards improved considerably at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 and was broadly in line with the national average. You and I looked at the work in pupils' books, which showed that they make good progress. Teachers ensure that most pupils receive appropriate challenge in lessons. Pupils practise their skills and then apply them to different problems. However, the most able pupils do not receive a consistently high level of challenge.

A striking characteristic of the school is the support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Several parents spoke highly of the provision for their child during the inspection. The special educational needs coordinator provides high-quality support to parents, pupils and staff, so that additional support is extremely well targeted.

You have ensured that pupils' personal development is well considered through the range of enrichment activities. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the extra-curricular clubs that they access. They also enjoy competing against each other and against other schools in sporting competitions. Pupils have a strong voice in the improvement of the school. The school council were proud of their recent projects, such as raising money for charity, organising a disco and playing a key part in the project to install new trim-trail equipment in the playground.

You and the staff have put in place a broad, balanced and thoughtful curriculum. Pupils were brimming with enthusiasm when talking about the learning that takes place in subjects such as history, music and science. Exciting topics ignite pupils' interest and enable them to develop a rich understanding. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about the impact of the Holocaust during the Second World War. They also talked about making rockets in science and what they learned when their lava-lamp experiment went wrong. Curriculum trips are relevant and memorable for pupils. They enjoy staying overnight for outdoor and adventurous activities and also enjoy other more local trips, such as to the theatre and to museums.

Governors are knowledgeable and committed and provide very good additional capacity to the school. The chair of governors provides effective leadership and ensures that other governors are supported to do their job well. Governors know the school very well and use this information to provide effective challenge to leaders. However, they have not ensured that pupil premium funding strategies are evaluated precisely enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is at the heart of the school. Designated safeguarding leaders do not leave any stone unturned to keep pupils safe. Staff receive regular training and have a good understanding of their responsibilities. Concerns about pupils are reported quickly and leaders take appropriate action. Record-keeping is very thorough and external services are involved in a timely manner. You have also been able to deliver specialist training to staff on important matters, such as the 'Prevent' duty.

You and the staff ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils understand the concept of bullying well and comments on this included 'It is when power is used inappropriately to hurt someone else.' They also have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and what to do if they are a victim of bullying or if they witness it. Pupils have also gained knowledge of how to stay safe online through e-safety week. They are very clear that they should not give out personal information online and they should seek help from a trusted adult if they are concerned about something they see.

Inspection findings

- You rightly identified reading as the most important priority on your school improvement plan. Over the last two years, attainment in reading by the end of key stage 2 has not been high enough. Leaders have put in place a range of successful strategies so that a culture of reading has been developed across the school. Teachers ensure that pupils are motivated to read regularly by rewarding them for reading a selection of texts. Pupils enjoy talking about the different authors and genres of books that they like the most. Comments from pupils included 'Reading is relaxing, you get to go into a different world' and 'The books are much better, we love reading now.'
- The reading leader has worked closely with staff to refine their teaching of comprehension. Consequently, during reading sessions, teachers ask pupils searching questions to check their understanding. Pupils are becoming increasingly skilled at finding information in the text in order to prove their answers to difficult questions. Staff provide regular opportunities for pupils to find definitions for new language that they have not seen before. Your assessment information shows that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards is rising.
- We looked at the actions that you have taken to accelerate the progress of the most able pupils in the school in reading and mathematics. You track this group of pupils well and use pupils' progress meetings to put in place effective additional support. However, the challenge in lessons for this group of pupils is inconsistent. They sometimes tackle questions that they can do easily or they do not move on to more challenging questions quickly enough. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards is not rising quickly enough.
- You put in place effective strategies to help support the academic progress and personal development of disadvantaged pupils. For example, learning mentors

work well with vulnerable pupils to help develop their social and emotional skills so that pupils are ready to learn in the classroom. Your assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils make the same or better progress than other pupils in school, particularly in reading and writing. However, leaders and governors do not evaluate the pupil premium spending allocation rigorously enough. Strategies are not precisely analysed for the impact that they have. As a result, leaders and governors cannot easily identify which strategies are the most successful in accelerating disadvantaged pupils' progress.

- We also focused on provision for pupils who have complex behavioural needs. Over the last few years, the number of fixed-term exclusions has been just above the national average. It is clear that you use exclusions as a last resort and you have a clear rationale for your decisions. You put in place good support to reintegrate pupils when they return to school after an absence due to exclusion. The inclusion leader and other staff also put in place individualised support for those pupils who have complex behavioural needs. These strategies are successful and some pupils show a marked improvement in their behaviour over time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupil premium funding strategies are evaluated precisely for impact so that they know which strategies are the most successful
- the most able pupils are consistently challenged so that more pupils attain the higher standards in reading and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Meekin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other leaders. I also met with three governors. I spoke to pupils informally and formally. I made short visits to eight lessons with you and looked at pupils' books. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered 23 free-text responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also considered the responses from the online questionnaire completed by pupils and staff.

I scrutinised various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan and the documents that you use to check the quality of teaching. You shared with me the most recent assessments of pupils' attainment and progress. We discussed the national test results and assessments undertaken by pupils in 2016 and 2017. I also looked at the school's published information on the website, as well as minutes of governing body meetings and information about attendance, behaviour and safety.