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Mr M Phillips
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Dear Mr Phillips

Short inspection of St Benedict's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders have created a calm, purposeful atmosphere and the Christian ethos promotes care and nurture throughout the school community. Your deputy headteacher supports you effectively, forming a very effective leadership team. As a result, you have a clear understanding of the strengths of your school and use this knowledge to put successful plans in place to improve the school further.

Leaders, including governors, place the school at the heart of the community. For example, as part of the work to improve reading outcomes, pupils read to residents at a local care home. This helps to improve pupils' confidence and fluency in reading and builds valuable relationships between the generations. Leaders are also proud of the wider opportunities available for pupils, especially in sport and music provision. During the inspection, parents' comments emphasised that they are grateful for the wider curriculum opportunities staff provide for their children.

The local authority and diocese support leaders appropriately, providing effective training, especially in reading, phonics and the development of basic skills in the early years. Governors skilfully monitor and evaluate the impact of leaders' actions and base meetings on effective questioning related to pupils' progress. They make good use of their professional skills, including their experience of educational leadership and safeguarding.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and their attitudes to learning are very positive. The

pupils that I met said that they enjoy coming to school because the staff care for them and make learning fun. They are also proud of their responsibilities in areas such as supporting younger pupils when they join the school. One pupil's comment summed up the positive attitudes evident across the school: 'We are proud of the school; it doesn't matter what religion or culture, we welcome everyone.'

Parents and carers are very supportive. All who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, would recommend the school. One comment summed up the feelings of the majority: 'All the teachers at St Benedict's go over and above. The time and commitment they give to the children are amazing. We are so lucky to have such an amazing school with fabulous teachers and staff!'

At your last inspection, several areas for improvement were identified. The first was to ensure that pupils are able to get on with challenging tasks quickly. This has been addressed successfully. Staff challenge pupils well and this is having a positive impact on pupils' progress across the school. Staff challenge pupils particularly well in mathematics. They are routinely given challenges and activities that encourage them to reason and explain their mathematical thinking. During the inspection, for example, we saw pupils in key stage 2 showing resilience in solving complex mathematical problems and persevering until the task was complete.

You were also asked to improve outcomes in phonics by ensuring that successful approaches to supporting learning are consistently adopted and pupils are fully involved throughout the lessons. The teaching of phonics is now a key strength of the school. Teachers plan lessons carefully and pupils engage well with phonics teaching. Pupils who need additional support are helped by high-quality interventions from skilled support staff. As a result, pupils make accelerated progress. Observations, and written work seen during the inspection, showed that the pupils use and apply their phonics skills effectively across a range of subjects.

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps required to enable the school to improve further. New strategies have been successful in both raising the profile of and improving pupils' attitude to reading. However, we agreed that leaders should continue to embed these strategies for improvement to ensure that progress in reading is substantial and sustained.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that all necessary checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are in place. You give safeguarding a high priority and a strong safeguarding culture runs through the school. Your close links with families help you to know when pupils are facing difficulties. You and the pastoral mentor work closely with a wide range of agencies and the local authority to ensure that your pupils are safe and well supported. Issues raised through regular surveys of pupils' safety are addressed immediately. Leaders give staff updates about national and local child protection issues to help identify any pupils requiring support or intervention. Attendance is above average because pupils feel safe and enjoy coming to school. All parents who responded to the Ofsted survey said that their children feel safe at school.

Inspection findings

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first of these considered the actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes in reading. Reading is now at the heart of school. Your vision is for all pupils to become fluent, comprehending readers. As a result of this priority, teachers are passionate about teaching pupils to read. Reading is effectively led by your English curriculum team. Pupils' progress is regularly assessed to identify the key reading skills which need strengthening. Lessons are then planned to focus on pupils' development of these key skills. Your approach to reading allows pupils to concentrate on decoding stories before developing fluency and comprehension. You also encourage them to read familiar books at home. Staff read stories to develop pupils' understanding of language. Teachers ensure that pupils take part in daily phonics lessons and additional activities to allow them to apply this knowledge to reading and writing. Your consistent approach to the teaching of reading begins as soon as children start school in the early years.
- Staff read to pupils every day, sometimes from books that challenge them and at other times purely for entertainment. As a result, many pupils choose to read at home and have set up a weekly club to share their favourite books. You have introduced a set of teaching strategies that are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' engagement with reading and their comprehension skills. Your work to promote reading for pleasure is successfully engaging pupils and encouraging them to read more frequently. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were enthusiastic about the new reading room which has been provided for them. One pupil commented: 'I didn't like reading but now I want to read because of the books we have.' However, you acknowledged that, despite some improvement, reading should remain an area for development. This is to ensure that progress in reading is substantial and sustained, especially for boys.
- The inspection evaluated the effectiveness of leaders' actions in raising pupils' achievement by the end of key stage 1. You have raised teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve. This is evident in the teachers' challenging questioning of pupils and in the pupils' neatly presented work in their books. Staff monitor the progress of pupils carefully. They then use the information they gather to focus their teaching on best meeting individual pupils' needs. A greater focus on spelling, handwriting and extended writing is having a positive effect on the progress of current pupils. They are enthusiastic about their learning, particularly in writing, and are excited to showcase their writing skills. This was evident during the inspection when pupils in Year 2 created their own fable. Subject knowledge across a range of subjects is good. Progress in mathematics is particularly strong. Work in books shows that pupils are developing fluency and application, acquiring the knowledge, understanding and skills they need. The most able pupils do work that is challenging and develops their reasoning skills well, for example as they solve addition and subtraction problems. As a result, work is well matched to the needs of pupils. The school's assessment data and work in books across the curriculum show that they are making better progress from their starting points. They are becoming confident and competent readers, writers and mathematicians.
- Another key issue that we examined was how well leaders are improving outcomes for

disadvantaged pupils. As a result of teachers' effective assessment of pupils' different needs, additional support is well targeted. Teachers also provide extra support in and out of class to address pupils' personal development needs. Leaders and governors regularly check on the impact that extra resources have on the skills and confidence of disadvantaged pupils. They allocate the pupil premium funding effectively and evaluate the difference it makes. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make faster progress than they did previously. The numbers of these pupils and their differing needs change from year to year. However, pupils receive personalised support because staff know each pupil extremely well. Your assessment information and work in books show that almost all are now making strong progress overall.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to embed their recent strategies for improvement to ensure that progress in reading is substantial and sustained, particularly for boys.

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 Sefton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hunter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, about their work and school life. I held meetings with you and with senior staff to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. I looked at learning in pupils' books. I also spoke to the local-authority improvement partner.

I reviewed documentation which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the school development plan. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

With you, I visited classes to observe pupils' learning. I met with three governors to discuss aspects of school leadership and management. I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.