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Mrs A Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Williams

Short inspection of St Benedict's Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 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.

You and the school's senior leaders are highly committed people. Governors have made several key appointments since the last inspection which has strengthened both teaching and leadership further. You have fostered a great deal of positivity and professionalism within the staff.

Leaders are conscientious and focused on securing the very best outcomes for children. St Benedict's has gained, and renewed, a range of key accreditations since the last inspection. This includes a prestigious 'Eco' award. You and your staff are very proud of the environment and learning experiences that you have established in an inner-city school. Your garden area is well tended by the school community. During the inspection, the greenhouse and borders were bulging with a wide range of fruit and vegetables. You and governors are committed to offering a rich learning experience.

Leaders have fostered a keen sense of accountability in staff. Teachers and support staff are very keen to discuss the impact that they have on learning. Staff are anxious to share what is working well and are receptive to feedback. Teachers have been provided with focused training to target their skills in areas such as assessment and the teaching of writing. This training is having a very positive

impact on standards across the school. Pupils' books evidence strong progress, high standards of presentation and a rich curriculum.

Outcomes have broadly improved across different year groups and phases since the last inspection. By the time pupils leave in Year 2, they consistently achieve in line with or above national standards. This marks strong progress given pupils' different starting points. The proportion of pupils who have met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has also increased year-on-year. Outcomes in phonics are above those found nationally and there are no gaps in performance between different groups.

However, outcomes in the early years dipped in 2016. A lower proportion of children achieved the early learning goals than in previous years. Attainment was particularly low for boys. Leaders responded quickly to this dip in attainment by establishing an action plan to respond to weaker areas of performance. As a result of your effective actions, rates of progress have improved and, over time, the vast majority of children are making at least average rates of progress. You and leaders recognise that your focused improvement work in this phase of the school must continue so that children's progress is accelerated further.

At the last inspection, you were asked to make more teaching outstanding by giving pupils opportunities to explain their ideas and thinking, and more support with spelling, grammar and punctuation. High-quality training has helped improve these areas significantly. Pupils' books evidence the rapid improvements in their writing skills. Pupils' spelling and grammar skills are developing well across the school. In every class I visited, pupils were keen to share their learning and demonstrated great confidence with their speaking and listening skills.

Leaders and governors have evaluated the effectiveness of the school accurately. The findings in the inspection were closely aligned to your own reviews of teaching and learning. You acknowledge that further work is required in improving attendance, securing an even greater level of challenge in lessons and refining assessment systems in the early years.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that systems and procedures are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding lead is tenacious. She has provided staff with regular and relevant training and acts quickly upon concerns. If the school is not satisfied with the level of support or response from an external agency, they escalate their concerns further.

Pupils' records are detailed and catalogue the steps that leaders take to keep pupils safe. Leaders also take account of any specific risks locally and build additional learning into the curriculum to support families. This has included workshops on e-safety and activities alerting pupils to the dangers of open water.

Inspection findings

At the start of the inspection I met with you and senior leaders to review the school's self-evaluation. During our discussions we agreed key lines of enquiry to ascertain the extent to which you have maintained a good standard of education at St Benedict's. The first key line of enquiry was attendance.

- For several years the percentage of sessions missed by pupils has been higher than the national average. Similarly, rates of persistent absence are also high within the school. You have established a range of strategies to address this issue and you are beginning to secure improvements. Recent analysis shows that attendance rates are now close to the national average and persistent absence has almost halved. Attendance 'hero bears', certificates, rewards and the setting out of clear expectations to families are making a significant difference. You recognise that this work must now be embedded further so that improvements are built upon.
- Fundamental British values and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are well promoted. Leaders have woven values into the school's curriculum and teachers capture different aspects of learning in large class books. Above all, relationships between staff and pupils are exceptional. Pupils' conduct is excellent and the whole school has a very harmonious and collaborative approach to learning.
- Assessment systems are well developed. Leaders meet with teachers to track pupils' achievement and establish additional support for anyone that falls behind. As a result, there are no significant gaps between the performances of different groups. However, the most able pupils' mathematics books show that there is often scope for a greater level of challenge. Teachers are beginning to adjust tasks more routinely if learning is too easy, but this practice is not fully embedded across the school.
- Developments in the teaching of writing are a particular strength of the school. Pupils are being introduced to a range of genres and techniques to help them develop their own writing. The school's approach is resulting in often rapid rates of progress. This is particularly noticeable in key stage 1 where pupils are writing at length with increasing independence and confidence.
- Outcomes in the early years dipped in 2016. Leaders responded quickly and have established effective actions to secure better rates of progress. However, while judgements about children's abilities are accurate, staff do not always take sufficient account of what children should do next to develop their skills further.
- The local authority's commissioned service for school improvement has supported St Benedict's to establish networks and partnerships with other schools. Leaders attend network meetings for key improvement areas and participate in reviews where they offer reciprocal challenge and support. These school improvement systems are effective. The school benefits from its commitment to working with other settings and is dedicated to constantly reviewing its own effectiveness.
- The vast majority of parents that I met and received feedback from are happy with the standard of education at the school. One parent commented, 'My child is

so happy and looks forward to going to school every day.' This view was typical of those that I spoke to during the inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- work continues to improve rates of attendance and persistent absence
- pupils are routinely challenged in mathematics and moved onto harder work if they find an activity too easy
- assessment systems are developed further in the early years to take greater account of children's next steps in their learning.

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

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with you and senior leaders to discuss the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans. We agreed key lines of enquiry to steer inspection activities throughout the day.
- I met with the school's administrative team to review the single central record.
- I conducted a learning walk with senior leaders visiting classes in Year 1, Reception and Nursery. During these learning walks I scrutinised learning in a range of pupils' books.
- I met with you and the designated safeguarding lead to review child protection records, training materials, certificates and risk assessments. We also reviewed the school's most recent attendance data.
- I spoke with the school's chair of governors and district lead for school improvement via the telephone. I met the district lead for school improvement at the final feedback meeting.
- I took account of the three responses from parents via Ofsted's free-text service. There were insufficient responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to generate a report.