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Miss Honor Beck
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Beck

Short inspection of St Robert Southwell RC Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 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. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Your leadership is effective and ambitious; you have successfully embedded strong practice in all aspects of the school. Governors, and senior and middle leaders, share your ambitions for the pupils in the school. Leaders at all levels, including governors, know the school well. The governing body has confidence in your leadership skills and has used additional funds well to provide support for disadvantaged pupils.

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured the senior leadership of the school and created new 'phase leader' roles. This has successfully strengthened the drive to improve teaching and learning and ensured that pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. In driving for improvement, you have maintained a strong community spirit and good communications with parents and carers. As one parent said in response to the Ofsted online survey, 'St Robert Southwell School is a friendly, welcoming school where all the children are encouraged to be the best that they can be.' As a leadership team, you are aware that a minority of pupils do not attend as regularly as they should. As a result, this rightly remains a priority for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding procedures are effective. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The chair of governors, the governor responsible for child protection and the headteacher countercheck procedures for recruitment and safety regularly. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training on safeguarding and are confident in assessing potential risks. All staff know how to report any causes of concern and the school has clear systems in place to make referrals.

The caring ethos around the school enables pupils to feel included in decisions relating to safety. For example, members of the pupil parliament take on some of the responsibilities for caring for and supporting the younger pupils in the playground. Pupils understand the need for caution and safety when using computers and report with confidence that 'when in doubt, click out'. Pupils consider the school to be a safe place where adults look after them well. They are confident that if they report a concern about how someone is behaving, staff will deal with the situation swiftly. Behaviour in lessons is very good and pupils play safely in the playground. Parents agree that their children feel safe and are well cared for.

Inspection findings

- We first agreed to review how leaders are ensuring that disadvantaged, middle-attaining pupils and boys achieve well and make good progress in reading and writing. At the end of Year 6 in 2017, these groups of pupils made better progress in mathematics than in reading and writing.
- Phase leaders work effectively with their teams to ensure consistency in the way teachers challenge their pupils, particularly in writing. Expectations of presentation are high throughout the school with extended writing opportunities evident across the curriculum. My review of pupils' books showed that teachers are consistent in their application of the school's feedback and marking policy. Pupils, including the disadvantaged and boys, are now making strong progress in their writing.
- Leaders identify quickly those pupils who are not strong readers. They ensure that these pupils receive effective support to improve their reading skills. For example, they read to adults and regularly take part in small-group work. The use of creative and sophisticated vocabulary is a feature of the school. For example, pupils in Year 3 demonstrated very effective ideas for writing as they were reading 'Esio Trot' by Roald Dahl. Pupils were able to link their responses to the story to their real class tortoise. All pupils are encouraged to read frequently and widely and enjoy using the well-stocked library. School information indicates that all pupils now achieve well in this area.
- Leaders ensure that phonics teaching is consistently strong. In 2017, there was a slight dip in the phonics outcomes for key stage 1 pupils. Despite this, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2017 remained above the national average. Leaders identify

early those pupils who are not able to recognise sounds. They ensure that effective support is provided so that these pupils make strong progress. In visits to lessons, pupils were working at expected, and in some cases above expected, standards in phonics. They were able to explain their learning articulately. Most-able pupils move to more challenging comprehension groups when they are ready. A review of pupils' books showed pupils' strong progress in writing and comprehension skills.

- In addition to supporting key stage 1 pupils, leaders have embedded effective strategies to strengthen phonics teaching in the Reception class. This has resulted in strong improvements in children's reading and writing outcomes.
- Leaders routinely analyse differences in the achievement of those who have been through the Nursery and those who enter the school at the beginning of the Reception Year. Governors and leaders look closely at the progress children make from their starting points. As a result, leaders identify early those children who require extra support. They make swift referrals to external agencies where necessary. Routines for good learning behaviours are evident in both the Nursery and Reception classes. Language development, number and writing activities are a focus for all children. Consequently, the proportion of children that achieved a good level of development is above average. Children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- A final focus of the inspection was to review how leaders are improving attendance and reducing persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The most recent data shows that attendance is now broadly in line with the national average for all groups. However, persistent absence for some pupils remains high. Leaders are aware of those pupils who do not have a strong pattern of attendance and work with parents to reduce their absence. Nevertheless, routines for following up absence are not rigorous. For example, contact with parents on the first day of a pupil's absence is not routine for all. Additionally, leaders are not always swift to meet with parents to discuss reasons for absence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- reducing pupils' absence from school is a priority so that attendance remains at least in line with national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, the assistant headteachers and phase leaders. I met with six school governors and the school effectiveness partner from the local authority. I carried out joint visits to classrooms with the headteacher, spoke to pupils and looked at their books. I listened to pupils read from Years 2 to 6 and I met with members of the pupil parliament. I viewed 126 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the responses of 30 staff and 11 pupil questionnaires. I scrutinised a range of documents including those relating to self-evaluation, attendance, the school's assessment information and safeguarding policies and procedures.