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Mr Shaun Carter
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Dear Mr Carter

Short inspection of The Bliss Charity School

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils continue to learn and achieve well. They benefit from a curriculum that makes a strong contribution to their love of learning and their personal development.

Since becoming headteacher in January 2017, you have built on the school's strengths. At the same time you have given attention to the areas you identified as needing further work. Pupils, parents and carers, and staff were unanimous in their praise for the changes you have introduced. The pupils spoke with pride about the smarter school uniform. They appreciate the new house system, which helps them to celebrate their achievements and their kindness to others. Pupils and their parents are particularly pleased with the improvements to the curriculum you and the other teachers have brought about. You took the decision to devolve some of the school's curriculum funding to class teachers. This has empowered teachers to devise exciting classroom activities. They complement these with a wide range of exciting trips and visits.

During this inspection, pupils in Year 5 were at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery finding out more about the Anglo-Saxons. Only the day before, a planetarium had been set up in the school for pupils in Years 2 and 4 to enjoy. The pupils in Year 3 told me how excited they were about their visit to the Snow Zone next week. This followed their work on Sir Ernest Shackleton and the Antarctic. Opportunities such as these are making a real difference to the

curriculum. They enhance pupils' enjoyment of school and give real stimulus to class-based learning in the foundation subjects. Improved assessment arrangements enable teachers to check that such activities are supporting pupils' learning well. Pupils' enjoyment of school is also enhanced by an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities, including in sports and music.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to strengthen some aspects of teaching. For example, teachers needed to check pupils' learning more effectively during lessons. The school was also asked to share the best practice in teaching across the school. Since joining the school, you have worked closely and effectively with staff to help refine their teaching. You have given particular attention to improving teachers' use of assessment to plan activities and make checks on pupils' learning. As a result, teachers have much better skills in assessing the impact of their teaching over a period of time. In the lessons we visited, teachers had used assessment information carefully to plan learning that matched pupils' different needs. We agreed, though, that teachers are not consistently using assessment in lessons to move pupils quickly on to more challenging work.

The school was also asked to track the progress of different groups of pupils more carefully. This was to strengthen leaders' and governors' understanding of how well different groups of pupils are achieving. Put simply, you have transformed this aspect of the school's work by introducing a rigorous approach to assessment. Staff at all levels now have a very precise understanding of how well different groups of pupils are achieving in key stages 1 and 2. Detailed class achievement planners mean that teachers, leaders and governors know exactly which groups of pupils are achieving well and which need additional support. The good quality of your work in this area is leading to more effective leadership at all levels. It has also strengthened the effectiveness of governance. You provide extremely helpful and detailed information for governors. This means that they now hold you and your colleagues more rigorously to account for pupils' achievement than before. These arrangements, however, are not yet fully in place in the early years.

These improvements are accelerating the progress of all pupils. Last year, pupils made better progress in key stages 1 and 2 than in the previous year. Pupils whose attainment had been average by the end of key stage 1 made particularly good progress by the end of Year 6. You know that this trend of improvement now needs to be continued so that all pupils make the rapid and sustained progress you, the staff and the governors aspire for.

Safeguarding is effective.

This is a school where pupils feel cherished and supported. They play happily together and know that their teachers will help them to sort out any problems they may have. The pupils reported that there is very little bullying in the school. They are well informed about the characteristics of bullying. They take seriously their duty to report any unkind behaviour to their teachers.

Staff receive annual training in child protection. More staff than usual have received enhanced training in safeguarding. This good range of expertise benefits all pupils, but especially those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to harm.

You have ensured that the documentation in place to support strong safeguarding practice is of a very high quality. For example, the referral forms that staff use if they have concerns make clear to them the actions they can take if they are not satisfied by the school's response.

You ensure that parents receive regular safeguarding updates through your high-quality newsletters. The school's website provides helpful information and advice to parents about where to find out more, should they have any concerns. For example, it includes information about the safe use of the internet.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the key lines of enquiry I would investigate to test whether the school remains good. First, I looked at the effectiveness of early years provision, particularly in securing high-quality learning for the most able children. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the early years has been consistently above average. Very few, however, have exceeded national expectations for children's learning and development.
- Our observations of teaching and learning in the early years showed that the most able children are learning well. This was confirmed by our scrutiny of the progress they have made. Initiatives to improve the quality of writing across the school are having a clear impact in the early years, including on the most able children. We saw some of the most able children writing phrases such as 'the big red bus' neatly and with correct letter formation. Assessment information shows that more children are now on track to attain highly than in the past. The strategic approach to assessing the progress of different groups of pupils seen in the rest of the school, however, is not yet in place in the early years. This means that the skilled early years leader is not able to evaluate effectively the impact of provision on different groups of children.
- I also explored the effectiveness of the school's work to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This is because their combined attendance was much lower than that of other pupils in 2016. You brought increased rigour to the management of attendance as soon as you joined the school. This has had a very clear impact in reversing the previous decline in the attendance of these groups. The attendance of all pupils is now monitored very closely. If ever a pupil's attendance dips, you and other staff quickly intervene. You have raised the profile of good attendance among staff and pupils. You have introduced rewards to recognise good attendance. At the same time, you have made it very clear to parents that you will challenge any poor attendance. Attendance has returned to the high levels previously seen.

The differences in attendance between groups of pupils have narrowed very sharply. Nearly all disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities now attend school very regularly.

- I also looked at the quality of the school's support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Although numbers are small, pre-inspection information suggested that this group of pupils might not be achieving as well as other pupils in the school. Evidence gathered from the inspection shows that these pupils are supported extremely well. They make strong progress in their learning and their personal development.
- The parents of children who need additional support were emphatic in their praise for the school. They praised the quality of support provided by the school. They reported that communication with staff is first rate and that any concerns are addressed immediately. The new leadership team is building very well on the good quality practice already established. Documentation has been refined to ensure that policies and practice are up to date. The team has also sharpened the quality of target setting and the procedures for reviewing the targets. Staff are now clearer that the approaches they are taking are working. Leaders throughout the school ensure that pupils consistently receive the extra support to which they are entitled. Teachers in all classes now have a much clearer understanding of the specific learning needs of all pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Finally, I investigated whether the faster progress of disadvantaged pupils in 2017 was being sustained. The school's published pupil premium strategy is of very high quality and is frequently reviewed. The strategy underpins the work you and the other staff are doing to raise the achievement of this group of pupils. As for other pupils, better use of assessment means that teachers, leaders and governors have a very strong understanding of how well disadvantaged pupils are achieving. You and the governors check the impact of spending extremely closely to see whether it is making the intended difference. Our scrutiny showed clearly that disadvantaged pupils are achieving well. In some instances, they surpass the achievement of their peers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers refine their use of assessment so that pupils of different abilities are moved on to more challenging work in lessons as soon as they are ready
- they analyse the achievement of different groups of pupils in the early years to identify how well provision meets the needs of different groups of children, including the most able.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This

letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and other staff to discuss the school's progress since the last inspection. I also met several governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with groups of parents as they brought their children to school and with groups of pupils before school and at breaktime. I also met a group of pupils from Years 3 and 4 separately to listen to their views about their school.

I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including policies related to safeguarding and the pupil premium. I considered the school's self-evaluation document and its plan for improvement. I looked at assessment information for previous pupils and those currently in the school. I considered the views of the 18 staff who contributed to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff. I also considered the 81 parental responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View as well as the 73 parental comments made through the Ofsted free-text service.

Together, we observed learning in all the classes that were in school. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 were not in school on the day of the inspection.