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20 May 2015

Penny Brown
Cottons Farm Primary School
Sheridan Street
Sinfin
Derby
DE24 9HG

Dear Mrs Brown

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Cottons Farm Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

Context

Cottons Farm Primary School is a smaller than average primary school with 150 pupils currently on roll, though the number of pupils has risen significantly in the past two years. It is part of a federation with another local school, Ash Croft Primary School, with whom it shares both a governing body and an executive headteacher. There is also a head of school on each site. The proportion of pupils who speak

English as an additional language is significantly above the national average. The proportion that is eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is also significantly higher than is seen nationally. The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is broadly average. A significant number of pupils enter or leave the school at times other than the normal starting points. There have been a considerable number of changes to staffing in the past two years, with many staff exchanging roles with staff at Ash Croft Primary.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils arrive at the school calmly and happily. They are met safely at the gate by a good number of staff, who greet them and ensure that pupils are settled and ready to begin their day at Cottons Farm. Staff attend to any issues quickly and sensitively. Parents I spoke to at the school gate, and throughout the day, were very positive about the school and all told me that they felt that their child was safe and happy there. Punctuality is good. Reasons for late arrival of any pupils are recorded at the school office, and staff follow these up appropriately. Pupils do not wait on the playground for the day to begin, but come into their classroom immediately, where teachers and support staff welcome them again and give them appropriate work to do while the register is taken and school dinners are ordered. The upper junior pupils that I saw were working well on a number of mathematics problems.

The school is a quiet and calm environment, and pupils' attitudes to their learning are good. I visited each of the classrooms in turn, some on more than one occasion. Children in the Reception class were busy on a variety of learning tasks. Many of them were working with their parents, whom the school welcomes and encourages to stay to assist and join in activities. Children were eager to show me some of the story books they had made in small groups, such as 'Duffy the Dog' and 'Fire Fighters'. Other children were learning how to make toast, playing dominoes and painting butterflies. In all the lessons I visited, pupils were working well. They settle down quickly, and they are keen to learn and make progress. Different groups of them cooperate happily. They are polite to each other, sharing learning resources appropriately, encouraging each other to succeed and to work together. They are also keen to give their ideas in lessons and show what they have done. In addition, they are also happy to volunteer to help staff, for example by taking registers to the school office. Overall, pupils respond briskly to instructions. In one lesson I visited, background music was used particularly well to help pupils practise their handwriting quietly, and then to tidy up sensibly afterwards. The small number of pupils whose attention wanders, or who do not follow instructions are noticed quickly by adults, who ensure that they listen properly and do as they are asked.

Relationships are very positive. Staff take care to model good behaviour at all times, speaking calmly, politely and attentively to both each other and the pupils they teach. This helps ensure pupils are settled and reflective. The opinions, feelings and thoughts of all members of the Cottons Farm school community are valued, and pupils learn to become more secure and confident as a result. They learn, too, how to take turns and cooperate, because staff encourage them to work with different partners and in a variety of groups, both small and large. In all the lessons I visited, adults used praise effectively to encourage good learning, not only to recognise where pupils have worked hard, but where they have persisted when their work is

difficult. In the Early Years, I saw older children helping and supporting younger ones to explore, discuss and learn new things. In another lesson, a group of Year 3 pupils were working together to invent characters for a story. They were being inspired to write because the teacher was encouraging them to believe in their own success. Pupils at Cottons Farm respect the authority of both regular teaching staff and support staff alike. However, some of the pupils I talked to said that this is not always the case with supply teachers. They said that, on occasions, some of their classmates do not automatically give these teachers the same authority, and this can disrupt some of the learning. The school is aware of this and is considering improvements so that even visiting staff are given the necessary respect they deserve at all times.

The whole-school behaviour policy, which is relatively new, is working increasingly well. Leaders are aware that they need to embed this fully, so that the behaviour of pupils throughout the school is of an equal and impeccable standard. For this to happen, leaders are planning for all members of staff to use the same rewards systems in their classrooms and all to have identical, clear expectations. Leaders also believe that they have more to do to explain the system to parents, so that it has widespread support. The school's current system of managing both rewards and sanctions is effective. Staff give rewards, which pupils say they value, for hard work and for following instructions quickly. Where pupils misbehave, or are unkind, staff give them an appropriate series of warnings. When it is needed, pupils stay inside at lunchtime to reflect on their own behaviour and make better choices next time. Pupils I spoke to say that the system is used fairly and helps them to behave. The inclusion manager works well with those pupils whose behaviour is particularly challenging.

School leaders write individual plans for those pupils who need particular support with their behaviour. Parents are given an opportunity to contribute to these plans too, which set out actions for improvement, along with the support that is being put in place to achieve them. However, evaluations do not always state clearly whether pupils have met the target which has been set for them. In addition, staff do not always quickly adjust plans to give a new target once a pupil has met their current one. This weakness in evaluation slows the rate of improvement in the behaviour of these pupils. Leaders are revising how these plans are written and monitored, so that their effectiveness is increased.

The number of exclusions, though still much higher than the national average, has fallen significantly this school year. The school helps pupils who have been excluded, and works closely with their families. This is to reduce their risk of the pupils being excluded again. Staff help pupils to understand why the exclusion occurred and give them ways to manage their frustration or anger. However, the rate of exclusion in the school remains too high, and leaders are aware that they must continue the reduction by improving the quality of support for those pupils. Governors are kept informed about exclusions and agree that excluding any child must always be used only as a very last resort.

Pupils generally conduct themselves around the school well. They are polite and courteous towards visitors, staff and each other. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, the atmosphere is positive. While school records show a small number of pupils fighting or using inappropriate language periodically, this is dealt with effectively and staff are both caring and vigilant when they supervise pupils. Pupils I spoke to told me

that they felt safe in school. Lunchtime assistants help pupils to play happily and organise games for them so they learn to share and work well in teams. Once playtimes are over, they are keen to come into school for their next lesson. They line up sensibly and quietly. They also leave the school at the end of the day in a safe and secure manner, where, once again, they are well supervised by staff, who meet and talk with their parents as pupils are collected. Over time, the number of parents who have responded to Ofsted's Parent View website is small. In the previous academic year, a significant percentage expressed negative views of some aspects of the school. However, there have been none who have done so this year. The school has undertaken its own parental questionnaire recently. Although the responses were few, those who took the survey were satisfied with the behaviour of the pupils, and were positive towards many other aspects of the school.

All staff make it clear to parents that that it is important for pupils to come to school each day, and requests for absence are not agreed to. Attendance is currently close to the national average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent fell significantly in 2013, to below the national average, where it remained until this school year. Since September, however, due to particular family circumstances, persistent absence has risen significantly and, at 7%, is currently more than twice the national average. Leaders and staff are working hard with both pupils and their families to reduce this figure.

Pupils I spoke to said that they are proud to be a pupil at Cottons Farm. They wear their uniform with pride, keep the school tidy and confirm that almost all the time, they get on very well together. When they have disagreements then they say that they can approach a member of staff, who will attend to it and put things right. Pupils were clear that, whilst some inappropriate language is used, it is rarely of a discriminatory nature. When misbehaviour happens, teachers encourage pupils to come forward. Incidents are carefully recorded and any patterns monitored by staff. They act quickly and give the pupils whose behaviour is unacceptable an appropriate sanction. They will also make it clear to the pupil why his or her behaviour was wrong, and help them to make a better choice next time. Pupils were very clear that this approach had helped them to improve over time. They believe that their school is a good one and that they are pleased to be part of it.

Priorities for further improvement

- reduce instances of exclusion by developing even more effective strategies to manage pupils' behaviour when it is most demanding
- ensure that the management of behaviour is as consistent as possible across the school, so that pupils are always clear exactly what they are expected to do, and know precisely what will happen if they do or do not behave well
- improve the effectiveness of plans for pupils who have particular behaviour needs, so that their success is fully measured against the targets, and further targets are quickly written once pupils have met them.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Derby, to the Secretary of State for Education, and to the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body