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Mrs Mandy Pickles
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pickles

Short inspection of Castleford Half Acres Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 March 2016, 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 November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Senior leaders work well as a team. You provide a clear direction for how you want the school to develop and improve. The head of school has a clear and detailed understanding of how well pupils are doing and how well teachers are teaching. Together, senior leaders have been successful in improving the school further since the time of its last inspection.

Senior leaders have created a culture and ethos in which high standards are expected from both pupils and staff. Through effective training and performance management, teachers feel well supported. Staff morale is high and teachers are proud to work at the school.

Senior leaders regularly make visits into classrooms to see for themselves how well pupils are doing. Senior leaders carefully check pupils' work over time and this helps them gain a detailed insight into how well pupils are progressing. Information derived from leaders' checks has resulted in recent changes to the way teachers mark and provide feedback to pupils. Pupils say these changes are helping them to better understand where they went wrong and how they can improve.

Inspectors identified the need to improve the progress pupils make in mathematics at the time of the last inspection and improve the quality of teaching. Pupil outcomes over time have steadily increased, especially in mathematics, across both Key Stages 1 and 2 due to strong improvements in teaching. Leaders have also taken sensible and effective action to significantly improve behaviour and attendance.

All leaders are highly vigilant and aspirational so do not allow themselves to become complacent. They know their school very well and are pleased with the improvements they have made. However, they do not rest on their laurels and know what needs to improve further, including making sure that the small number of pupils leaving Reception below age-related expectations catch up quickly during Key Stage 1.

Governors are confident and capable. They ask challenging questions of senior leaders about the progress of pupils, especially the progress being made by the most-able pupils. Governors are closely involved in evaluating how well the school is doing. Governors also benefit from being provided with a wide range of comprehensive information from different sources including senior leaders, local authority officers and by link-governors visiting the school to see what is going on for themselves.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The single central register is well maintained and careful checks are made on all staff who come to work at the school. Staff recognise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and an effective 'early warning system' informs senior leaders if there are any concerns about pupil safety. All staff receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe, including spotting signs of extremist behaviour and administering first aid when necessary.

The atmosphere around the school is usually calm and purposeful. Pupils confirm that they and their classmates usually behave well and are friendly to one another. Leaders have been sharply focused on improving attendance. These actions are having a positive impact. Through the use of rewards including prize draws, termly parties for good behaviour and school trips, attendance has improved considerably. Close links with external agencies ensure that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need to keep pupils safe and in education. Individual support plans for vulnerable pupils would benefit from having clearer and more measurable targets so it is easier to regularly hold the school and other agencies and professionals to account for the difference they are making in improving vulnerable pupils' outcomes.

Inspection findings

- As a result of strong leadership and management, teaching continues to improve. This is why pupils are achieving well. The gaps between the attainment of pupils nationally and the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in the school continues to narrow at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2 these gaps have largely closed.
- Teachers in nursery and reception have been quick to spot that some children need to have even more opportunities to develop their mathematical and language skills. Effective actions have been taken to ensure that there are more opportunities for children to play with mathematical equipment including dice, cubes and timers. A suitable range of reading books are also used to help children further develop their confidence in storytelling, speaking and listening.
- Joint observations with senior leaders revealed their sharp eye for detail and their unrelenting demand for high standards from all their pupils and staff. A Year 5 lesson on the poem 'Life in the garden' exemplified these high expectations. The teacher continually encouraged and expected pupils to develop their explanations and thoughts about the poem and did not settle for second best efforts.
- Parents that I spoke with told me that they were happy to send their children to school each day and one parent spoke for many when she said 'I'm really pleased with this school.' Parents say teachers are welcoming and approachable. They appreciate the good levels of communication between school and home and particularly benefited from the information school leaders provided on the new national curriculum.
- The federation development plan broadly captures the priorities for both Ackton Pastures and Half Acres Schools. However, leaders and governors recognise that in order for the plan to be an even better tool to support school improvement, more detail is required in explaining what specifically needs to improve at Half Acres School and how progress will be checked.
- The curriculum is rich and varied and provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities to develop their understanding of the world. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about other cultures through celebrating the Chinese new year, having French days and appreciating African art. They are also taught to take responsibility, including being representatives on the school council or 'peer support' during playtimes.
- The school website contains useful information; particularly regarding the impact pupil premium funding has on pupils' progress. It would be even more helpful if key policies such as the equal opportunities policy and those relating to anti-bullying were easily found. The website would be even better if more precise information was provided on the impact of additional funding such as the PE sports funding and how disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are benefiting from school support.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching continues to improve so that even more pupils are ready for Key Stage 1
- school plans, including child protection plans, are further refined so that there are clear and measurable outcomes for what will be improved and by when
- the school website contains detailed information on the impact additional funding for PE and SEND is having on pupils and ensure that key policies can be easily found.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the head of school, the leader for early years and the special educational needs coordinator. I also met with a group of pupils, members of the governing body, a group of parents and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Together with your head of school and early years leader, we visited all classrooms to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. We also spent time looking in depth at the work and progress of pupils over time. Consideration was given to six responses from the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). I evaluated recent information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. I also reviewed documentation and records about how you keep pupils safe.