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Mr R F Naylor
Headteacher
Forefield Junior School
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Dear Mr Naylor

Short inspection of Forefield Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 17 November 2015 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Your staff share and understand the vision of senior leaders and governors. Consequently, this creates a culture which is not only inclusive, welcoming and child-centred, but also consistently promotes high expectations in both teaching and learning. You constantly review practice in school to see what is working well and where improvements can be made. Parents report that the experience you provide for all pupils at Forefield is one that prepares them well for future success. As one parent wrote: 'The fact that our daughter has woken up every day of her school life, raring to go and excited about school speaks volumes. She is happy, nurtured, eager to learn and confident. We credit Forefield's staff for their part in helping our daughter grow into person she is.' This is typical of the many positive comments received from parents of pupils attending your school.

At the previous inspection, inspectors reported on the strength of reading in the school and commented on pupils' exemplary behaviour. You have maintained high standards in these areas. The school environment promotes reading very well and encourages pupils to have a love of literature. Positive relationships are modelled by staff and these help to shape the excellent relationships among pupils. Pupils' behaviour, conduct and manners continue to be exemplary; pupils are very proud of their school.

To improve further, following the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to use assessment information more carefully to plan activities to challenge all pupils. They also suggested that the marking of pupils' work and target setting procedures should provide clearer guidance for improvement to support more rapid progress for pupils, especially the most able. Having spoken to senior leaders about assessment, it is clear that they know all pupils very well and keep a close eye on the progress made by all. If pupils are being left behind, plans are put in place to enable them to catch up quickly. The marking of pupils' work has also developed well. I spoke with several pupils about their work and they could demonstrate how teachers' marking had helped them to deepen their understanding within subjects. Pupils also shared their targets with me and showed me how they had used these to improve their skills, for example in writing.

The previous inspection also identified an area for improvement in the leadership and management of teaching and learning by: ensuring that monitoring activities happen more regularly; ensuring that whole school assessment information is used to drive the improvement of groups of pupils; involving all leaders and managers more in self-evaluation strategies and by providing more opportunities to share the best practice in teaching across the school. Monitoring activities are now more regular and middle leaders are more involved in these self-evaluation procedures. Teachers complete 'peer observations' where they observe each other's lessons and discuss areas of strength and areas to develop. You still need to consider more carefully how you can use whole-school assessment information to check on the progress of specific groups of pupils and share this information with governors. For example, it would be helpful to check on how much progress your most-able writers are making over time and how much progress disadvantaged pupils make in mathematics, comparing the progress of both of these groups to similar pupils nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and are up to date. Systems to check the suitability of staff to work with children are robust. Governors take safeguarding seriously and have recently commissioned a safeguarding audit and planned actions have been followed up rigorously. Teachers and other staff are aware of systems and procedures to keep pupils safe and know exactly what they would do if they had concerns about the safety of any pupil. They have received regular, comprehensive training on child protection and safeguarding.

Pupils of different ages explained to me how they feel safe in school at all times. They could also explain in detail how they should keep safe online. Pupils enjoy learning in a welcoming and inclusive environment. The school's ethos is such that politeness and good manners are expected; this ensures that pupils' behaviour is consistently strong. Pupils also said that bullying is very rare or does not happen at all. They would be confident that it would be dealt with quickly if it happened. The view that pupils are kept safe and are well looked after was shared by every parent who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have an ambitious vision for all pupils and this is shared by all staff. The teaching observed during the inspection demonstrated high expectations in all classes. Pupils say that they love coming to school and parents agree that their children enjoy school. High expectations of behaviour permeate the school and pupils are polite and well mannered. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary and pupils report that they get along together no matter what their backgrounds are. They share their thinking and learning eagerly and talk about how well their teachers support them. Pupils proudly told me how they persist with work even when faced with challenges. The outcomes of pupils are enhanced strongly by the provision of clubs during lunchtimes and after school. Over 350 pupils have attended clubs in the last year.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and are aware of areas for improvement, for example in mathematics. You have recognised that pupils need more opportunities to practise their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics lessons to further improve outcomes. However, you still need to analyse in more depth whole-school assessment information to ensure that specific groups of pupils, such as the most able and the disadvantaged, make the progress they are capable of in all subjects. Action plans for improvement are sometimes not focused enough on the precise improvements needed for specific pupils.
- Middle leaders are now more regularly involved in monitoring teaching and learning within their subjects. This has enabled them to identify strengths and weaknesses and for these to be fed back to staff. Monitoring activities are incisive; the areas for development in mathematics, identified through monitoring activities, are similar to those that I observed.
- Governors are committed and are ambitious for the school. They attend meetings regularly and have a wide range of skills and experience. Although they have a general understanding of how well the school is performing, they do not always receive the precise information they require to fully hold leaders to account for the performance of all pupils.
- Leaders have correctly identified that standards in reading are high and that reading is a strength of the school. You place a high value on pupils developing a love of reading. The learning environment celebrates the joy of reading and you have made a substantial investment in quality reading texts for pupils to enjoy. Pupils listen enthusiastically to the viewpoints of visiting authors and enjoy theatre groups, which help to develop their understanding of literature. Activities such as these have really enthused pupils to read and have resulted in all pupils making strong progress in reading from their different starting points.
- Work in pupils' writing books shows that they are making good progress over time. They learn how to write for different purposes and for different audiences. Their writing skills are developed well because teachers' marking shows them what they are doing well and clearly articulates what pupils need to do to improve. Pupils spoke confidently about their writing targets and how they concentrate on using these to improve their writing.

- You have worked hard to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of life in modern Britain. Pupils learn about various religions and are knowledgeable about the different cultures around the world and in this country. This learning is enhanced by visits to religious places of worship and by listening to visiting religious leaders. Pupils could explain what they had learnt about the plight of refugees in a recent study. You also ensure that pupils learn how to develop into well-rounded citizens through a series of well-planned assemblies which teach pupils important values, such as respect and tolerance. More displays of pupils' work in these themes around school would stimulate their curiosity and understanding even further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- action plans contain the specific detail needed to secure improvements in outcomes for all pupils in writing, in particular for the most able
- governors receive the information they need to hold leaders to account for the performance of all groups of pupils, especially the disadvantaged
- pupils have more regular opportunities to practise and develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics to further improve outcomes for all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy, who is also the mathematics leader, the assessment leader, literacy leaders, five governors, a group of eight pupils and the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I spoke with other pupils informally, both in and out of classrooms, and had informal discussions with other teaching and welfare staff. I looked at a wide range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, action plans, governors' meeting minutes, documents relating to safeguarding and information relating to pupils' progress. I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and to speak with them about their work. I also considered the views of 43 parents who completed the online Parent View questionnaire.