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Rhian Richardson
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Dear Mrs Richardson

Short inspection of Hillside Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Even though that inspection was of your predecessor school, you have dealt progressively and successfully with the areas for improvement set out then by the inspectors.

Pupils' attendance is now above average. In particular, you have reduced well the levels of persistent absence among disadvantaged pupils and boys.

You have provided good training and development for subject and other leaders, including making effective use of a good range of opportunities offered by the academy trust of which your school is a part. Those leaders are now playing a significant role in the work of the school.

You have put in place a coherent approach to managing the performance of staff, linked with other training and development opportunities. Through that approach, you have raised teachers' expectations of what the pupils can achieve. Teachers set work now at a level matched more closely than before to what pupils can achieve, including in the early years.

The ethos and values of the school are strong. They are emphasised in many ways around the school's attractive and well-kept accommodation and grounds. The pupils take on board those values, becoming well balanced young people with

positive attitudes to school, to learning and to life in general. They show pride in their work and in their appearance, looking smart in their uniforms. All of these things make a major contribution to the school being a calm and orderly place.

I saw many interesting and attractive displays of pupils' work. Not only do the displays contribute to the welcoming ambience of the school, they show also the breadth of the school's curriculum.

Reading and writing are, manifestly, emphasised, starting in the early years, but not at the expense of other subjects. Rather, through careful thought and planning, you create many and varied opportunities for pupils to learn reading and writing throughout the other subjects of the curriculum.

The strategies that you use to develop reading and writing are carefully researched and well considered, in order to tackle particular issues in pupils' achievement. You have identified the issues astutely by looking at information about how well pupils have done in the past and are doing currently. After not enough of the pupils at the school made the expected progress in reading in 2015, you took deliberate and concerted action, with the result that the pupils in Year 6 in the following year made significant improvements in their reading ages. Also, the early, though still provisional, information about those pupils' results in the national tests this year shows that they made good progress in reading, with an above-average proportion reaching the expected standard for their age.

The same early information shows a similar picture in relation to pupils' writing. Pupils have not done quite as well in this subject as in reading.

You give appropriate priority to dealing with differences between the achievements of groups of pupils. You have put in place a comprehensive array of support to assist disadvantaged pupils. Broadly, though not universally, these pupils are starting to catch up with and even to overtake other pupils nationally, in terms of the amount of progress that they make.

Overall, some differences remain between the achievements of different groups at the school. Boys, generally, do less well than girls. Historically, not enough of the most able pupils have made sufficient progress to get above the standards expected for their age by the end of Year 6.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and the governing body have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The staff are trained regularly and kept up to date with safeguarding matters. They are alert to potential matters of concern and such things are followed up routinely. They understand the sorts of national concerns of which they should be aware, such as radicalisation and extremism. They show a good awareness of other, seemingly small matters that, nevertheless, need to be looked into, and report such things appropriately, using the school's systems and records, including in the early years.

The persons responsible for managing safeguarding are trained and you have ensured that there are more of these people than is often the case elsewhere, so that there is always someone available at the school. The designated managers know in detail the individual cases requiring a high level of attention. The case files are kept conscientiously and in good order.

You work well with local agencies to get the appropriate support for any pupils needing it and are persistent in seeing things through to a conclusion. Even when there have been instances of pupils needing support, but not at a level sufficient to get external agencies involved, you have provided support to families that has led to demonstrable benefits for the pupils concerned.

The governing body oversees this aspect of the school's work closely. It draws on support from the academy trust, as well as from the local authority, to check more frequently than is often the case on the effectiveness of the school's practices.

The pupils with whom I spoke told me that they feel safe in school. All of the parents with whom I spoke and the great majority of those who either wrote to me or completed the inspection survey, Parent View, confirmed that their children feel safe at the school and that they are looked after well. The pupils raised few concerns with me about bullying, or the use of racist or homophobic language; that included the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils. All of those with whom I spoke said that you deal with any such incidents effectively.

The pupils take on board the things that you teach them about keeping themselves safe. They told me, undramatically though earnestly, about how to deal with things on the internet and regarding the safe use of mobile phones.

Inspection findings

- You have worked rapidly since becoming headteacher in January of this year to introduce new systems for monitoring what is happening at the school. The systems have helped you to involve leaders and so improve the effectiveness of leadership throughout the school. Collectively, you are identifying appropriate priorities for improvement and taking concerted action to deal with them.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the early years is rising and is increasingly close to the national average.
- In particular, the proportion of boys reaching a good level of development is improving well. The boys continue, however, to lag behind the girls.
- Staff in the early years assess children's learning continuously and pick up on any learning needs promptly.
- Assessments lead to targeted support for individual pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.
- You showed me examples of the impact of such support. The examples included work by some boys that progressed quickly from being marks that were merely scribble, to work recognisable as letters.

- You have designed the curriculum in the early years so that children are able to move on to progressively more difficult work. By assessing each child's progress continuously, you are able to vary the pace at which children are moved on according to each child's capabilities.
- The staff look out for opportunities to get children working on more difficult things as soon as possible. For example, I saw a member of staff asking the children to count back while playing outdoors, jumping along a line of hoops.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. I saw, for example, some lovely art work inspired by the work of John Constable, nicely written accounts from pupils' studies about Tutankhamun, written reflections by pupils identifying examples of personal behaviour that demonstrated kindness, from small acts to major, and interesting definitions by children in the early years explaining what kindness means to them.
- I discussed with the pupils their enjoyment of physical education (PE) lessons and sport. I saw and heard the pupils' enthusiastic responses to PE lessons in the school hall!
- You have put in place a coherent, whole-school approach to teaching reading and writing, beginning in the early years.
- In the early years, you have chosen topics deliberately to capture the interest of boys more readily than previously. The boys show greater interest now in writing and are more willing to write about the topics.
- You have used some of the extra funding that you have received for disadvantaged pupils to develop particular outdoor experiences in the early years and to make sure that disadvantaged pupils benefit from them. You showed me evidence of how learning in the outdoor area has improved these pupils' social skills and emotional well-being, leading in turn to improvements in the children's behaviour and better involvement with other children when learning.
- Your work to teach the children phonics is usually effective. Typically, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 is broadly average.
- You have worked successfully to put in place a whole-school approach to phonics, so that the pupils who do not reach the standard at the first attempt are able to do so subsequently.
- In previous years, you have had pupils as late as Year 4 who had still not reached the standard expected in the Year 1 screening test. As a result of your efforts, all pupils now reach the standard by the end of Year 3, which shows that things are getting better.
- Nevertheless, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching the standard in phonics in Year 1 lags persistently behind that of other pupils; so does the proportion of boys, more often than not.
- You have put in place broad-based, whole-school approaches to teaching reading and writing throughout the school. The priority that you give to these subjects is apparent. There are books everywhere in the school and the pupils show a genuine love of reading, including the boys.
- The pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who read to me approached the task confidently and used their knowledge of phonics well to deal with unfamiliar or difficult words.

- Disadvantaged pupils have benefited from the extra individual support that you have provided to increase the opportunities for them to read. I witnessed several examples of one-to-one sessions that gave the pupils concentrated and focused attention, which helped them to improve their reading skills.
- While the most able pupils are encouraged successfully to read books of an appropriate level of difficulty, I found little evidence of a similarly systematic approach to enabling these pupils to develop their reading skills as much as those other groups.
- You have not, for example, identified any particular or specific barriers that might be faced by the most able disadvantaged pupils with their reading, although they benefit from the extra attention that you have given generally to reading with disadvantaged pupils.
- The pupils' work books demonstrated the many and various opportunities designed for the pupils to write. Even in mathematics books, it was obvious that teachers look for suitable occasions on which to get pupils writing.
- Teachers make sure that the most able pupils are aware of what they need to do to produce work at a high level.
- The guidance written for pupils in their work books shows how teachers look for suitable opportunities and ways for the most able pupils to improve or to extend their work. Pupils use the guidance to make good improvements.
- In lessons, teachers often expected the most able pupils to give appropriately long, carefully thought-out and detailed answers to questions verbally. Your monitoring shows, however, that this is not done consistently and I saw variations in the quality of oral feedback to the most able pupils about their answers to verbal questions.
- The initial, though still provisional, information about how well pupils have done in the key stage 2 national tests this year shows that about one fifth of the pupils reached the higher standard in each of the subjects tested. Although the statistics are not comparable with those of previous years, the latest information suggests that the school is having more success than previously in getting the pupils above the nationally expected standards. When the results from reading, writing and mathematics are combined, however, only a small proportion of pupils reached the higher standard.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils get work, are questioned and are given guidance that consistently increases the depth of their understanding and leads them on to work of a higher order of difficulty, so that they are able to reach the highest levels possible
- the remaining differences between the achievements of different groups are reduced, including for boys.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I looked particularly at: the support for disadvantaged pupils, for boys, and the work to develop children's reading in the early years; the work in the main school to develop reading and writing skills, particularly for boys and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; and the quality of support for the most able pupils, including those among them who are disadvantaged. I held meetings with the headteacher and a senior leader, the coordinator for English, the early years leader, the chair of the governing body, the governor overseeing safeguarding and another governor, and the designated person responsible for safeguarding. I met with representatives of the academy trust of which the school is a part. I visited lessons jointly with the headteacher. I examined examples of pupils' work and looked at teachers' assessments of that work. I held a range of discussions with a wide variety of pupils, informally when observing breaktimes, and during lessons. I listened to some pupils reading and discussed with them their views of the school. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, at breaktimes, and during lessons. I looked at the views of parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, spoke directly with some parents at the start of the school day and read a letter sent by a parent to me. I examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, the latest achievement information for the school, and information about the school's use of additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils. The school's website complies with the Department for Education's requirements.