

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



31 October 2016

Ms Tracey Coles
Headteacher
Blackwood School
Blackwood Road
Streetly
Sutton Coldfield
West Midlands
B74 3PH

Dear Ms Coles

Short inspection of Blackwood School

Following my visit to the school on 6 October 2016 with Janet Satchwell, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. You and other leaders are not afraid to be challenged and the pupils are at the centre of your decision-making. As a result of a sharp focus on raising standards, achievement has continued to rise across the school since the last inspection.

In 2011, inspectors asked you to ensure that the curriculum consistently excites pupils. You were quick to review your practice and have established a new curriculum that is indeed exciting. You plan special moments throughout topics that are designed to capture the imagination of pupils. Alongside your leadership team, inspectors looked carefully at work in pupils' books and found many examples of pupils using their creative skills. Leaders and governors were also quick to respond to the request to increase challenge for the most able pupils. We found some strong examples of where most-able pupils are given the opportunity to develop their independence and present their learning in different ways. You have also ensured that governors are now more involved in evaluating the work of the school.

The staff that responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire all feel proud to work at Blackwood. Staff feel supported and acknowledge that the school is aspirational for

its pupils. During the inspection, staff were keen to share the learning that was taking place in their classrooms. Their responses to the questionnaire and general manner demonstrate their pride in the school.

The behaviour of pupils was exemplary throughout the inspection. Pupils were happy to talk to me about what they were doing, and those that I spoke to all reported that they feel safe. I was greeted with 'hellos' and good manners in every classroom we visited. Pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities and several hold important positions, including ambassadors, prefects and school councillors.

You acknowledged that the highly effective practice in early years should be maintained to ensure that achievement continues to rise and that you are keen to further improve middle leadership and quality of teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your safeguarding team know the needs of pupils well and your records demonstrate that you respond to any concerns. You have adapted the curriculum so that pupils are given opportunities to learn how to stay safe. Recently, pupils met with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to learn about safety through a 'Speak out, stay safe' programme.

Your staff have been trained so that they are aware of their responsibilities. You keep detailed records of this training. Staff that I spoke to demonstrated a clear understanding of a range of safeguarding matters, including how to respond if they had a concern about radicalisation or extremism.

Inspection findings

- We visited the early years to explore your response to a decline in attainment in 2015. We found that children are making rapid progress as a result of your strong assessment systems and effective practice. The staff that we spoke to know the next steps that children need to take to secure further progress. Children's language skills have also been a focus of your development work. We found that staff are skilled at extending and developing children's language. We agreed that you should focus on maintaining this effective practice so that the improvement in attainment in 2016 is built upon further.
- Pupils in Year 2 who read to inspectors demonstrated that they have continued to build successfully on the solid phonics knowledge they acquired in Year 1. Pupils continue to attain well in their reading at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. Outcomes in both key stages were above national levels in 2016.
- The effectiveness of governance has developed since the last inspection. The governing body undertook a review of its work and has reconstituted its membership. An annual skills audit also helps governors to identify any gaps in their expertise so that they can recruit new members accordingly. A link governor system has been established so that members can partner with different classes and share learning. Governors regularly visit a nominated class throughout their time at Blackwood School so that they can strategically monitor

the impact of the curriculum over time. Governors also use assessment information to explore any variation in rates of progress for different groups of pupils and use this information to challenge leaders.

- We focused some of our inspection work on assessing the rates of progress made by disadvantaged pupils from their starting points. Leaders track the achievement of disadvantaged pupils carefully and each child has their own plan with objectives to support both their progress and personal development. Governors challenge leaders and closely monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils. As a result of your work, any differences between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally have diminished over time.
- Inspectors met with middle leaders with responsibilities for the curriculum, science and special education needs. Middle leaders have developed action plans and are adding capacity to the leadership of the school. However, middle leaders are not yet fully established in their roles. Some of their work is quite new and the impact of their actions is not yet fully known. Middle leaders are keen to undertake a wider range of monitoring activities so that they can identify effective practice and share it across the school. Middle leaders are also focused on developing their assessment procedures and improving the way they use data to monitor achievement across the curriculum.
- Teachers are given time to plan together as year groups. You report that this helps them share ideas and ensure that learning is engaging. This was evident in a number of classes that we visited. However, checks in pupils' books and visits to classrooms show that further work is required to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is of a consistently high standard across the school. Our discussions identified the benefits of sharing best practice and plans are in place to extend this approach.
- During our learning walk, we observed Year 2 pupils developing their writing by studying settings from popular children's films. In Year 6, pupils thoughtfully discussed an animation and assessed the relationships and behaviour of different characters. This observation identified strengths, especially in teachers' use of questions.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start of the day and reviewed the 77 responses on Parent View. The vast majority of parents are happy with school and say that they would recommend it to another family. One comment identified that 'Blackwood is a fantastic school where my children have been making really good progress.' A small number of parents raised concerns through the free text service. The systems and procedures you have in place at school address the issues that were raised and you were keen to receive feedback.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- work continues to build on the effective practice which exists in early years to further raise attainment and increase rates of progress
- middle leaders are supported to further develop their skills, including their use of assessment information, so that they can increase the impact they have on standards across the curriculum

- best practice in teaching is shared further so that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment improves to the next level.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and other senior leaders to discuss the school's development since the last inspection and agree key lines of enquiry.

Together, we visited classrooms and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors listened to pupils read and observed their behaviour in lessons and around the school.

The key lines of enquiry chosen to test on the inspection day focused on: standards in the early years foundation stage, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, the development of the curriculum and the impact of leadership and governance. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. The school's local authority adviser, who is also a school governor, attended the meeting with governors.

Inspectors evaluated the school's self-evaluation plan and school improvement plan. They also scrutinised a range of safeguarding and health and safety records. Inspectors met with leaders to discuss their improvement work and analyse assessment information.

Inspectors met with staff and pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views about the school. We also considered the responses to online questionnaires, of which there were 14 from staff, none from pupils and 41 free text responses from parents.