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28 November 2016

Clare Spires
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Dear Mrs Spires

Short inspection of Barnsbury Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2012.

Context

The school converted to an academy on 1 January 2014. Together with four other primary schools it forms an umbrella trust called the Swan Trust. Leaders and staff from the trust offer each other support and challenge.

There have been significant changes to the staffing and governing body since the school was last inspected. The chair of governors took up post in November 2014 and you were appointed headteacher in January 2015. You subsequently appointed two new deputy headteachers and three senior leaders.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. During the year after the previous inspection, achievement fell in both key stages 1 and 2. Since your appointment in January 2015, you have developed a strong leadership team and provided a clear vision to improve outcomes for pupils. Inspired by the positive, aspirational ethos you have created, staff have worked together effectively to restore high-quality teaching across the school. As a result, standards are rising and current pupils are making good progress. Staff feel valued and view the changes you have made positively.

The school has improved during the last year and a half because you, school

leaders and governors use your accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school to prioritise actions to take. Leaders set out to systematically address aspects of the school which could be even better. There are a number of examples which illustrate this. In September 2015, leaders introduced a new method for teaching phonics. By July 2016, the proportion of pupils who met the Year 1 phonics check had more than doubled. Leaders also took effective action to strengthen teaching throughout the school and particularly in key stage 2. Staffing is now stable, and well-targeted professional development enables staff to develop their subject knowledge and teaching skills well. Teachers are embracing an improved way of providing challenge for all pupils. This is helping build pupils' confidence to try more difficult tasks and not to be afraid if they get some wrong at first. In the lessons we visited, pupils showed a willingness to have a go at more difficult challenges. The books I reviewed provided evidence of teachers' ambitious expectations of pupils, including the most able.

You rightly identified that pupils' progress in mathematics was not as strong as in reading and writing. Consequently, you have introduced a new way of teaching mathematics which has already had a positive impact on pupils' progress. Pupils are increasingly able to apply their basic mathematical skills to solve problems. In Year 5 and Year 6 lessons, pupils were working confidently, grappling with problems of increasing difficulty and also happy to check answers with each other and seek advice.

An example of sustained improvement at the school is the four-year increase in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Provisional information shows this has risen from 27% in 2013 to 71% in 2016. You, your leaders and governors have shown strong ambition to develop provision further in the early years by opening a Nursery in September 2016. This is intended to help children get off to a good start even earlier and prepare them for entry to the Reception Year. On our visit to the Nursery, we saw all the adults supporting children well. The children were playing happily and cooperatively and showing sustained concentration.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to raise achievement in writing. After a dip in 2013, standards have recovered in both key stages 1 and 2. Work in pupils' books shows that your current drive to improve grammar, punctuation and spelling is having a positive impact. Previously, inspectors identified two further areas for improvement: to ensure marking in all subjects provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work, and to give more opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning. Leaders have addressed both of these aspects effectively. Lessons have time built in to enable pupils to look back over their work and carry out necessary corrections. Pupils I spoke to explained clearly what they were expected to do during reflection time and how it was helping them improve their work.

One of your strengths as headteacher is your willingness to seek advice. Leaders commissioned two reviews of the effectiveness of the pupil premium

expenditure, which have been considered together with your own evaluation of the interventions taking place to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, leaders and governors are now prioritising the need for high-quality teaching in the classroom, with additional sessions to help pupils who are falling behind to catch up. You have used performance management robustly to improve the standard of teaching during the last 18 months. The school's performance information and work in books shows that disadvantaged pupils are now making good progress, at least in line with their classmates. Very few most-able disadvantaged pupils were identified by school leaders.

Leaders from the other schools in the Swan Trust provide support, moderate work and also visit the school to conduct quality assurance reviews. However, the evaluations from these visits do not use the success criteria on your own, well-structured school improvement plan. As a result, this peer review is not as sharp as it could be. Sensibly, governors have sought further external verification about the performance of the school from the local authority adviser.

Pupils continue to behave well throughout the school, enjoy lessons and work cooperatively. Most parents expressed support for the school, but a small minority are dissatisfied with the way leaders meet their children's needs.

Despite these recent improvements, you are determined to tackle areas needing further development. Standards achieved in the end of key stage 2 assessments are not yet high, especially in mathematics, although performance in this subject is improving strongly. Progress of current pupils is rapid overall, governance is strong and the leadership team demonstrates good capacity to improve the school further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. You are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe at all times and that a culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Leaders ensure that all employment checks are carried out and that staff receive appropriate training. Staff know pupils very well and they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly. They ensure they seek the right advice from other agencies when necessary. The parent support adviser works effectively with families and children experiencing difficulties. Staff, pupils and most parents are united in their view that pupils are safe in school. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn to keep themselves safe, including online. Pupils are confident that any concerns about bullying will be followed up rapidly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- Governance has improved under the strong leadership of the astute chair of governors. For example, when recruiting new members, he ensured that only candidates who would strengthen the expertise of the governing body were shortlisted. Governors participate in regular training to improve their skills. Visits are frequent so governors can monitor actions taken, and they have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Consequently, the governing body is able to provide effective challenge and support for school leaders and contribute well to the school's overall improvement.
- During my visits to classrooms to observe learning, you demonstrated clearly the results of steps taken to develop staff and improve the quality of their practice. This, and other activities, showed me that leaders accurately identify strengths and areas for development, provide high-quality training and hold staff to account robustly.
- The teaching I saw across the school was inclusive, purposeful and clear. The school's information about pupil performance and work in books shows that most pupils are progressing well. The most able pupils are now experiencing greater challenge, although this is not yet consistent across the school, particularly in mathematics.
- Children enter the early years with skills and abilities that are a little below those typical for their age. Provisional 2016 information shows that the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development at the end of Reception Year was above the national average. This represents strong achievement.
- Leaders have ensured that outcomes in key stage 1 continue to improve. Following disappointing results in 2015, they have rightly reviewed how phonics is taught and have subsequently changed strategy. This has proved successful and provisional results indicate that the proportion of pupils who met the phonics check increased from 34% in 2015 to 77% in 2016. Current progress measures and my visits to phonics sessions indicate that this year's Year 1 pupils continue to improve.
- Parents appreciate the effort leaders make to assist them to support their children at home. One parent commented: 'I found the workshops on phonics for parents very helpful. This makes it easier to engage with your child at home and to support teaching.'
- Pupils read fluently and the books they are provided with are well suited to their ability. New readers are able to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds to accurately decipher new words. More confident readers use expression well to bring the text to life for the listener. The most able readers use considerable skill to infer meaning from more challenging books and stories. They enjoy reading and have a zest for literature.
- The leadership team, driven by your tenacity, work systematically to improve outcomes for all pupils. Their work is particularly well prioritised on those areas that need to see immediate change. For example, the work leaders have done to develop the mathematics curriculum and how it is taught has resulted in significant improvements in pupils' achievement. This was seen

both in lessons and in books, where some pupils demonstrated skills in number at a standard that exceeded expectations for their age. Leaders must now ensure that pupils have greater opportunity to develop their ability to solve worded mathematics problems and explain their reasoning.

- Staff have high expectations for all pupils, but particularly those who are disadvantaged. Following reviews of the use of pupil premium funding, leaders' priority is now developing teaching to be better tailored to this group of pupils. A review of pupils' books and the school's most recent progress information shows that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. Leaders now need to focus on ensuring that they better identify the most able disadvantaged pupils and ensure they make at least as much progress as other pupils with the same starting points nationally.
- Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of leaders. They are receptive to improving their own skills and act according to advice from senior leaders. All staff are wholeheartedly committed to bringing about positive change.
- A large number of parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, with 93% saying that they would recommend the school to other parents. The majority of parents who submitted free text responses were very positive about the improvements which have taken place, the willingness of staff to help their children and the strong leadership of the headteacher. A minority of parents noted that there were still some inconsistencies in the school and a few parents expressed concerns about the lack of appropriate support for their children. Overall, parents' responses were highly supportive of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- from their respective starting points, pupils make greater progress in mathematics, particularly in key stage 2
- the robustness of external validation of leadership and management from within the academy trust is strengthened
- there is an increased focus on the progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other senior leaders, and three governors including the chair of the governing body. I also talked with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I visited classes across all year groups in the school with you. I reviewed samples of pupils' work in writing, mathematics and topic across key stages 1 and 2 and listened to pupils read. I considered 43 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I took careful account of 150 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free text responses, conversations with parents waiting to collect their children from school and one telephone call. I spoke with a group of pupils from across the school. I looked at documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information about pupils' learning and progress, minutes of meetings and records regarding safeguarding and attendance.

These inspection activities were employed to gather evidence against the following lines of enquiry arising from pre-inspection analysis:

- How well are disadvantaged pupils progressing, including the most able?
- Is work challenging enough, especially in mathematics?
- How strong is the leadership of the school and how well have leaders responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection?