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1 February 2017

Jacqueline Nicholls
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Dear Mrs Nicholls

Short inspection of Dickens Heath Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2017, 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 July 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have created a highly inclusive, community school where all pupils feel valued and welcome. In particular, parents of children with complex and sometimes high level medical needs, value enormously the good-quality nurture and care offered. As one parent put it, 'From day one, the school made it their job to understand and support my child. Not only is my child well cared for but she has been made to feel like an integral member of her class, an experience she has never had before.' Other parents spoken to and those who expressed their views were similarly glowing in their praise for the support and care their children receive.

Together with your staff, you ensure that pupils not only achieve well academically, but also benefit from a broad range of curriculum opportunities. Visits, visitors and a wide range of different activities and extra-curricular clubs all add to pupils' enjoyment of school and provide memorable experiences. Pupils are polite, helpful and well behaved. They respect adults and each other due to the high expectations set by you and your staff.

You have successfully addressed the key issues identified at the previous inspection. Teachers routinely check on pupils' progress during lessons and provide additional help and support as needed to ensure that pupils make good progress. You have

also refined your school improvement plan so that it is sharply focused on the most important whole school priorities. You use assessment information and regular checks on teaching to accurately identify areas of strength and pinpoint areas for further development.

Together with your leadership team, you have introduced a number of new initiatives in English and mathematics to help improve the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' progress. However, there is more to be done in increasing the levels of challenge for pupils of all ages in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly the most able pupils, so that a greater proportion can demonstrate that they are working at greater depth at the end of each key stage. Further work is also needed to embed and extend pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics, as there is currently little evidence of this in pupils' books. As a result, pupils are unable to explain the mathematical processes used or justify their answers.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You and the designated leader for safeguarding have ensured that all staff and governors have received the latest guidance on how to keep children safe in education. All staff, including those who are newly qualified, receive regular training so that they know precisely what to do if they have any concerns about pupils. Swift referrals are made to the appropriate external authorities where you deem concerns raised by staff are serious and warrant external support. Careful records are kept and stored securely. Robust checks are carried out when employing staff to check they are fit to work with children.

Pupils feel safe at school and their parents agree. Regular reminders are given to pupils about seeking adult help if they have a problem. Pupils quickly pointed to photographs of staff displayed in a main area of the school, and explained that staff were 'there to help them if they had a problem'. Personal safety is strongly promoted through a clear message of 'the big three': say no, go to a safe place and tell an adult. Regular assemblies, visitors and lessons also reinforce safety messages, for example about water safety, due to the nearby canals, road safety, outdoor safety and staying safe on the internet. Pupils make full use of the 'time to talk' pastoral support provided at lunchtime and several pupils explained why they had used it, and how talking through a problem had made them feel better. The culture of safeguarding within the school is therefore well established.

Inspection findings

- As the headteacher, you have created a united and hard-working staff team. You have a clear vision for ongoing improvement and have set high standards of conduct for staff and pupils. Staff morale is high, as evidenced by the staff questionnaire responses. Your self-evaluation of how well the school is achieving is honest and accurate. You ensure that teachers receive high-quality training and support to improve their performance, and work in collaboration with other

schools to gather ideas and share good practice. You lead by example and set the tone for the family-friendly environment within the school.

- You are ably assisted by a dedicated and willing leadership team. Together you carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching. Staff respond well to the feedback and advice provided by leaders. Recently introduced subject clinics have been successful in identifying which aspects in teaching are working well, and which areas teachers need further support with. Subject and senior leaders have evaluated the systems in place and introduced some new initiatives to help strengthen teaching and accelerate pupils' progress further. For example, a more systematic approach to teaching phonics has been introduced, together with a new approach to teaching mathematics with increased opportunities for pupils to develop their visualisation skills.
- The governing body are knowledgeable and experienced in their roles. They provide a good balance of challenge and support. They have a good understanding of which groups of pupils are performing well and where gaps still exist. Governors gather first-hand information for themselves through visits to the school; pupils give them a guided tour, answer any questions and express their views. This gives governors a real insight into what it is like to be a pupil at Dickens Heath. Governors monitor the budget carefully and have a good knowledge of what the pupil premium is spent on, and the impact this has on eligible pupils. You provide regular updates to governors in meetings and subject leaders feed back on their roles and impact of actions through presentations. This ensures that governors are fully informed and can ask challenging questions.
- Most children join the Nursery or Reception Year with skills and knowledge which are at least typical for their age in all areas of learning. There are no particular areas of weakness. Children make good progress in the early years and the large majority reach a good level of development. Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the school. Standards have remained consistently above average since the previous inspection at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- Good teaching enables all groups of pupils to achieve well. However, work in pupils' books shows that there is a lack of challenge in some lessons, particularly for the most able pupils. Work provided does not consistently extend pupils' thinking or build on the skills they already have. This prevents some pupils from acquiring the skills needed to demonstrate working at greater depth. For example, pupils in key stage 2 were required to insert one-word answers onto a worksheet to use the correct spelling of 'their, there or they're'. This task was accomplished easily by the most able pupils and there was no opportunity for them to use their own ideas or apply this knowledge in their own writing.
- Good use is made of the additional funding received for pupil premium pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils make good progress. Leaders responsible for these groups use assessment information to detect which pupils need further support. Information from parents is also utilised fully. A good range of intervention programmes, together with group or individual tuition, are provided. This helps prevent pupils from falling behind. Effective use is made of teaching assistants and volunteers to provide additional adult help. Resources are also utilised well for pupils with

hearing difficulties, with, for example, hearing loops in classrooms and teachers using microphones, together with other physical aids and specialised equipment. Staff have received appropriate training and provide well for pupils with different additional needs.

- Reading is taught well from the outset. Pupils read regularly and from a variety of books. Pupils are encouraged to review and critically evaluate the books they read in their home learning journals, even the younger pupils in key stage 1. This helps pupils simultaneously develop their writing skills alongside formulating their preferences of genres and authors. The school has a well-stocked library which is used regularly by pupils and carefully monitored by the school's librarian. The recently introduced phonics scheme is providing a more systematic approach to younger and less-able pupils in order to break down and blend unfamiliar words. While standards in the Year 1 reading check are consistently above average, you are keen to raise standards even further and increase the numbers of pupils working at greater depth.
- Pupils' writing is of a good quality. Cursive writing, using flicks and joins, is taught in the early years. As a result, pupils' handwriting is very neat and their work is well presented. The writing process has been firmly established throughout the school. Pupils plan, draft and edit their work carefully. The very best pieces of work are then published and made into beautifully presented and decorated story books. You and your staff have made a conscious effort to reduce the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in writing. You have introduced more boy-friendly topics, such as 'cowboys', in the early years. This has been successful and gaps, particularly in the early years, have narrowed considerably. Most pupils use grammar, punctuation and spelling accurately. They have good levels of understanding as this aspect is taught well. On occasion, teachers are overly cautious in their assessment of pupils' writing. While published data appears to show an issue with pupils' progress in writing in key stage 2, work seen in books shows that a good number of pupils are working at greater depth and that pupils make good progress. Good links are made across the curriculum, including incorporating computer skills into English activities.
- You have introduced a new approach to teaching mathematics and purchased a new scheme in order to help pupils have a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts. Staff training has also been provided. Increasing opportunities are given to enable pupils to carry out problem-solving activities and use resources to develop and consolidate their understanding of number and place value. However, pupils' ability to explain their thinking and demonstrate secure reasoning skills is still under-developed. This limits the numbers of pupils working at greater depth.
- Pupils enjoy school and are proud to attend Dickens Heath. Attendance is above average for almost all groups. The only group whose attendance is below average is for pupils with education, health and care plans who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this is because there is a relatively small number in the school and many have complex needs. As a result, some only attend part-time or have time off due to medical treatment. This has a disproportionate effect on attendance figures for this group. You ensure however

that the attendance of all pupils is carefully tracked and monitored. Where there are concerns, swift action is taken and referrals made to ensure that pupils are safe and able to come to school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that teaching provides:

- greater levels of challenge for pupils, especially the most able, so that a greater proportion can demonstrate working at greater depth
- more opportunities for pupils to use reasoning skills in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Lines of enquiry pursued during this inspection focused on:

- the level of challenge for the most able pupils in each key stage
- the rates of progress in writing in key stage 2
- how leaders monitor the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities with education, health and care plans
- how well leaders use additional funding to support vulnerable pupils
- the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, and leaders with responsibility for English, mathematics, pupil premium and special educational needs. I also met with six members of the governing body and spoke briefly to the chair of the governing body prior to the inspection. I discussed the work of the school with you, and checked the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding, alongside your designated safeguarding leader. You and the deputy headteacher joined me on visits to several classrooms. I spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I listened to pupils read and met with older pupils to gather their views about the school.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's information about pupils' achievement and attendance. I also reviewed the school's own evaluation of its work, together with the school development plan. I took account of the 99

responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View. Additional information was collected from parents at the end of the school day together with letters sent to the lead inspector and parent text comments. There were 38 responses to the staff questionnaire and their views were considered. 111 pupils also gave their views through the online questionnaire.