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Mrs Carolyn Dalziel  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Dalziel

### **Short inspection of Ashfield Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 February 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 March 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Ashfield is a happy, welcoming school where pupils are overwhelmingly positive about their experience. Pupils are very eager to share their views about school life and do so very articulately. They hold you in high regard for your approachable manner, the way in which you look after them and the high expectations you promote. For example, one pupil commented upon your daily 'safe check' walks around the school saying, 'The headteacher cares very much about us and wants the school to always look good so we have somewhere nice to learn, but she also expects us to look after it like she does.'

The school is a calm, colourful and stimulating place to learn, where relationships between all adults and pupils contribute strongly to pupils' achievement. Pupils are quietly confident and thrive on the self-belief that you and your staff instil in them. Pupils behave exceptionally well. They are eager to learn, have very positive attitudes towards their learning and can talk knowledgeably about how they want to improve their work. Your class 'ambassadors' epitomise this when they welcome visitors to their school and explain what is going on in their classrooms. Consequently, pupils are being well prepared for the next stages of their education and beyond.

Pupils are provided with many opportunities to take on responsibility, and enjoy being role models for younger pupils. They show an in-depth understanding of what this means and the impact that their behaviour has on others. For example, Year 6 pupils speak very proudly about the 'tie ceremony' they have at the beginning of Year 6. They explained that the school holds an assembly whereby all Year 6 pupils are presented with a tie bearing the school shield and it is representative of their position as the oldest pupils in the school. They wear this with pride. Additionally, the younger pupils talked, equally as excitedly, about when they get to Year 6 and looking forward to receiving their tie. The previous inspection assessed pupil behaviour and safety as outstanding, and it remains a strength of the school.

The continued success of the school is testament to the commitment and desire you, your staff team and governors have to ensure that all pupils leave Ashfield equipped with the skills they need to help them to be successful in future life and be the best they can be. Parents agree this to be the case. One parent summarised the responses saying, 'Ashfield Junior School is an extremely positive environment where children flourish. Expectations have increased steadily throughout the years and children have been very fortunate to have incredibly committed teachers. The emphasis on community and the arts is impressive. Children leave the school well-rounded individuals who are used to taking the lead and holding positions of responsibility.'

Since the previous inspection, you have taken effective action to ensure that your school continues to improve. Teaching and learning in mathematics were areas to improve. In all the lessons that we visited together, pupils' progress and development in mathematics was clearly evident, both in the classroom and in the pupils' books, in every year group. Inspection evidence, along with improving outcomes, demonstrates that pupils are achieving well in mathematics. This is because they are being given many opportunities to develop their reasoning skills. For example, teachers use phrases like 'convince me' and 'explain why you think that.' There is evidence that pupils are constantly being encouraged to explain the methods they use and the reasons behind their answers. In another example, in a Year 4 class, pupils were ably applying the column method to addition and a pupil said, 'I know a method you can use to make it quicker.' The pupil continued by explaining eloquently a more effective method and used patterns he could see to prove it.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, your team, and the governing body have rigorous arrangements and procedures in place to ensure that pupils are safe and secure in the school. These routine practices create a strong culture of effective safeguarding throughout the school. All potential staff are thoroughly checked before they are offered employment. Staff and governors undertake appropriate training and are regularly kept up to date about safeguarding issues. Staff are well informed on any issues of which they need to be aware and take responsibility for ensuring that all pupils are well looked after.

Pupils are supported by strong working relationships between the school and many external agencies. The support includes that of a dedicated pastoral leader within school. You have a meticulous approach to paperwork detailing needs and actions. Referrals are made in a suitable manner and concerns followed up appropriately and swiftly.

Pupils told me that they feel safe at the school. They know that there is always someone they can talk with and are very confident that they would be listened to, helped and supported. Pupils talked about the various ways they can seek help, including the use of their class 'worry box'. Additionally, pupils are astutely aware that they develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They talked about learning about bullying, internet safety and how to keep themselves safe. Pupils were adamant that there was no bullying at their school and very few incidents of pupils 'breaking the rules'. Pupils were very definite that if there are any arguments, these are resolved quickly and fairly by all adults. Pupils said, 'We care about each other and look at the values that will make us better people when we are older.'

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school's provision. Your improvement plan is precise, comprehensive and structured to ensure that the actions you take can be easily measured so you know what difference you and your team make to pupils' achievement.
- Although governors are very committed to the ongoing success of the school, not all governors are equally effective when challenging school leaders. In some cases, this is because they are new to the role, and for others, they are not yet applying the training they have undertaken effectively enough. Hence, they do not provide the challenge and support to leaders or understand what difference they are making to the school on its improvement journey.
- As part of the inspection, to ascertain whether the school was sustaining good standards, one of the key lines of enquiry I explored was whether a large enough proportion of pupils are making better than average progress from their starting points on entry to Ashfield in reading, writing and mathematics. Inspection evidence, looking at pupils' books, confirms that more pupils are making good, or better, progress across all three subject areas. Throughout the school, pupils' reading skills are well developed. Teachers provide numerous opportunities to use complex reading skills, such as inference, in lessons and throughout the curriculum. Pupils read fluently, and many read at home for pleasure. They were keen to share their varied reading experiences. One pupil said, 'I like reading the classics.' When asked, the pupil was able to explain what a classic was.
- Pupils become skilful, proficient writers over time. They use grammatical features and structure effectively and understand the requirements of various types of writing. Pupils discuss their writing with considerable insight and exhibit real pride in their 'free write' work. Boys are particularly enthusiastic about this and

said that they 'love doing free write because they can write about whatever they want, but they still have to use their spelling, grammar and punctuation well.'

- The focus you have had on improving mathematics teaching and learning has been successful. Pupils are progressing well in mathematics as a result of thorough planning, good subject knowledge and effective teaching. Work in books reveals that pupils regularly show confidence in their number skills. Pupils investigate challenging mathematics problems and successfully deepen their mathematical understanding and reasoning.
- Another line of enquiry, and a key area for improvement in the school development plan, was the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are steadfast in precisely pinpointing the need that is outlined in the pupils' individual 'passports' and securing personalised support. As a result, the differences in achievement for disadvantaged pupils, including those who are the most able, compared to their peers nationally are now diminishing in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders are meticulous in their support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including many who are also disadvantaged. The inclusion leader and the deputy headteacher, in her role as 'pupil premium champion', are very astute about securing appropriate interventions to support disadvantaged pupils' learning, and meet pupils' varying social and emotional needs. The support is flexible, well planned and routinely responds to pupils' developmental requirements. Pupils have targeted 'personal provision maps', and pupils and their parents are included in regular reviews of progress towards their targets. As a result, pupils are well supported and are making good progress.
- Overall attendance at the school is consistently above the national average. However, last year, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was not as good as their peers. You are aware of this and have been rigorous in your approach to improving attendance for this group of pupils. Consequently, current school information shows an improvement in disadvantaged pupils' attendance.
- Ashfield is developing effective working relationships with the feeder infant school. The partnership is positive, with both schools, for example, referencing each other about the work they do for induction on their respective websites. However, developing the partnership is an area you are continuing to work on, particularly with regard to assessment. This is to secure a seamless transition between the two schools and ensure that pupils achieve the best they can from their starting points.
- Parents concurred with the pupils' views that they are safe. Through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the texts received, parents agreed that their children are happy at school, and all report that their child feels safe at Ashfield. One parent said, 'Staff make themselves available to parents. The headteacher and staff always make time to listen to any concerns, and offer a range of proactive options for providing a solution to a problem. The children's safety and welfare is prioritised at Ashfield.'

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the governing body measures the impact of its work on the school's performance rigorously and that all governors are highly effective
- pupils make even greater progress in reading, writing and mathematics by developing the shared assessment practices with the infant school.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we visited all classes together. Then I reviewed pupils' books to consider the standard of work and the progress being made in all subjects and I talked to pupils about their work.

I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the inclusion leader to discuss the school's work. In addition, I held meetings with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. As part of my evidence-gathering, I heard some pupils read and met with two groups of pupils to discuss their school experiences.

Additional activities I undertook included a review of the school's website, a range of school documentation, including policies, current assessment information, your school development plan and school self-evaluation, as well as safeguarding procedures and systems. I took into account 47 parent responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 46 parent texts.