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Alison Peacey
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Peacey

Short inspection of Ashton-under-Hill First School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 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 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.

The school's motto, 'Expect only the best', exemplifies your ambition to strive for excellence. You took up your post in September last year and quickly established a highly motivated team of staff and governors who are eager to learn from expertise wherever it can be found. All staff are keen to honestly evaluate what is done well and identify where improvements can be made.

Pupils at Ashton enjoy learning and appreciate the imaginative approaches taken by staff to help them learn in exciting ways. For example, at the time of the inspection, children in the Reception class were trying to find the missing dinosaur that had apparently hatched from its egg. They used a variety of equipment to count and measure the dinosaur's footprints.

Pupils of all ages are keen to be successful learners. Their typical advice for their classmates includes, 'Focus when the teacher is talking', 'Always be ready for lessons', and 'Do the things you never dreamed you would.' Pupils benefit from a range of visitors, clubs and residential visits. The older pupils explained that the school is 'close to perfect' because learning is so much fun.

You are the second headteacher to be appointed since the previous inspection. You have continued to develop suitable initiatives to bring about the necessary improvements identified in the previous inspection report. The recently introduced system to track pupils' progress is helping staff to more accurately identify the individual steps of development required for pupils to meet longer-term goals. Teachers share their clear expectations with pupils and, as a result, pupils confidently reflect on the quality of their work and how they can improve further. Some local first schools have adopted the same assessment tracking system. As a consequence, staff are able to check their judgements with others and thereby achieve greater accuracy, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

Parents are more involved than at the time of the last inspection. Staff provide a variety of methods for parents to engage with their children's learning and celebrate achievements. A large number of parents attend workshops to help them understand how to support their children. There are also opportunities for parents to see how their children are learning in class. Parents are kept informed by regular newsletters and meetings. The views of parents and pupils are valued by school leaders and are acted on. The vast majority of parents who responded to the online survey agreed that the staff respond well to any concern. They also confirmed that they now receive valuable information about their children's progress.

You quickly identified individual staff members' strengths to further develop a senior leadership team. You are in the process of building more subject expertise and extending teachers' experience of different age groups. You have also enabled teaching assistants to make best use of their knowledge and skills to take on additional roles and responsibilities. You and the staff have correctly identified that further work is needed to develop a precise understanding of what is required of pupils to achieve at a greater depth within the expected standard in all subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff know the pupils well and demonstrate a high degree of care for individual pupils' welfare. All staff ensure that pupils can speak to a trusted adult whenever concerns arise, however minor. Pupils agree they feel safe because all adults are kind and caring. They say the school is like 'one big family' because they all know and look after each other.

Staff are in no doubt about safeguarding procedures because guidance, training and updates are thorough and frequent. Records demonstrate that concerns are acted on speedily and the effectiveness of support is reviewed regularly.

All checks on staff, visitors, premises and planned activities are complete, up to date and suitably detailed.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has been above the national figures for the last three years.

Reception staff have established close, ongoing liaison with the local playgroup and eight neighbouring nurseries. As a consequence, they are familiar with the children's learning needs and emerging strengths when they enter Reception. Staff conduct home visits so that parents can contribute to the teacher's understanding of what the children know and can do. On entry to Reception further assessments are conducted to quickly establish where learning priorities lie and enable staff to plan accordingly. All adults in Reception are adept at posing questions or observing children to accurately identify and track children's progress and plan for their learning needs. Children are attentive, able to reflect and try hard to succeed. Staff carefully plan purposeful and highly structured activities, which successfully capture the children's attention and imagination. As a result, the children believe they come to school to play.

- Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check are consistently above the national average. Adults methodically build on pupils' prior learning and use questioning effectively to ensure pupils' understanding. They model sounds clearly and expect high standards of accuracy in pupils' responses. Teachers are careful to link phonics, spelling and writing so that the skills are reinforced and applied for different purposes. Reading for enjoyment is imaginatively encouraged by the school; for example, a bedtime story was held where pupils returned to school in their night clothes to hear stories followed by a drink of hot chocolate.
- In 2016, fewer Year 2 pupils attained the expected standard in mathematics than in reading and writing. The coordinator for mathematics provided training and additional resources to raise expectations and help improve staff's subject knowledge and confidence. She introduced new approaches to teaching mathematics so that pupils spend more time learning, developing and applying new skills. This approach has enabled pupils to deepen their understanding and appreciate a range of mathematical reasoning methods to solve problems. Teachers have gained considerable confidence since September in planning appropriate mathematical activities in response to their assessments of pupils' progress. Staff are beginning to expect more of pupils and they are at an early stage of being able to demonstrate pupils' mathematical understanding at a greater depth.
- You have worked hard with all staff to develop a shared understanding of the age-related standards of greater depth. In addition, you have all focused on improving and recording accurate assessments of pupils' progress. You have clearly communicated higher expectations for pupils' outcomes. The essential skills required in reading, writing and mathematics are introduced as early as possible. Pupils practise and embed skills such as spelling, punctuation and mental calculations in mathematics over a period of time to achieve greater accuracy. Displays in classrooms and teachers' feedback remind pupils of ambitious vocabulary and pupils are rewarded for the correct use of new words. Staff are beginning to appreciate the demands of greater depth and are planning more ambitious challenge for the most able pupils. Teaching assistants now regularly work with high-ability pupils to steer them through appropriate challenges.
- Staff speedily identify those pupils who need additional support. Pupils whose progress is stalling are quickly spotted and appropriate help is provided either as

a short intervention or as longer-term provision. Staff are increasingly confident in assessing the reasons for pupils' delayed progress or apparent difficulty and communicating with parents to find a solution. You ensure that the small proportion of disadvantaged pupils are fully included in organised activities, including those where a cost is incurred.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff continue to develop a precise understanding of what is required of pupils in each subject to achieve at a greater depth within the expected standard for all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the coordinators for the early years foundation stage, reading and mathematics, representatives of the school council, the chair of the governing body and four governor representatives. We observed lessons together and looked at pupils' work. I considered the responses from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I took account of the school's self-evaluation, plans for development and behaviour logs. I considered pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read various school policies including those for safeguarding, child protection, curriculum and behaviour. I also took account of the impact of additional government funding on the progress, achievement and inclusion of a very small proportion of pupils.