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18 July 2017

Mrs Shirley Frankis
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Frankis

Short inspection of Dallington Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Parents and staff both commented on the nurturing, family feel of the school. One parent described the school as 'a small rural school with a big heart'. Every child is known as a unique individual and this helps teachers to ensure they are kept safe, are happy and make good progress in their learning.

The school has certainly benefited from being part of the Woodlands Federation. You took on the leadership of two other local schools in June 2013. In September 2014, Dallington formally joined the federation and you became executive headteacher. Federation governors are competent and hard working. They visit the school regularly to check for themselves what is going well and what can be improved. You are reassured that governors are knowledgeable about the school and challenge you about the most important aspects, including how well the disadvantaged pupils are doing. During the inspection, we agreed that there is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and how they present their work are not always high enough. Governors and leaders are aware of this and are committed to ensuring that the new executive headteacher who succeeds you in September continues to address this.

On the whole, children play and learn well together in the school's idyllic setting. For example, I observed pupils playing chess, football and other games harmoniously in the summer sunshine. Although behaviour is good, it is not perfect. Pupils reported

that they sometimes fall out with their friends and occasionally cannot get on with their learning because they are distracted by others. Older pupils take on responsibilities around the school, such as acting as 'e-cadets' who help their peers to stay safe online. The curriculum is enhanced by visits and trips to places of interest, and by residential visits such as the one to Port Lymne that took place during the inspection.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to improve teaching, especially in key stage 1, and to improve the impact of middle leaders. Teachers have moved around the school to teach different year groups since that time, and expectations in terms of the curriculum have risen. Current key stage 1 pupils are taught well and are making good progress, especially in mathematics. The federation has enabled expertise in different subjects to be shared effectively throughout its schools. This has led to stronger professional development and better training for teachers.

You and the head of school have rightly identified weak attendance, the challenge for the most able, and the use of spelling, punctuation and grammar as areas for improvement in the current school improvement plan. My visit confirmed that these priorities are correct. However, actions to improve each of these areas will need even greater focus from your successor.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are kept safe from harm because staff know each of them as individuals and quickly notice any change in their behaviour or attitude. There is a strong, caring culture. Staff are fully aware of the latest government guidance on safeguarding and the procedures that they must follow. You and the head of school have recently updated your training to broaden your knowledge of the risks that pupils face in modern-day society. This training has helpfully refreshed your focus on spotting the signs of danger.

The checks on staff and volunteers who work with children are completed and recorded in line with guidance. Governors regularly check that these are in order.

In recent times, the school has not needed to routinely work with other agencies over safeguarding issues. As a result, only limited records relating to safeguarding have needed to be compiled. However, the record keeping relating to pupils' welfare needs to be strengthened so that patterns in behaviour and minor concerns can be tracked more easily over time. Governors fully accept this. You and they made improvements to these systems during the inspection.

Inspection findings

■ During this short inspection, we agreed to focus on:

- the actions that you are taking to improve attendance
- how effectively phonics is taught, and how well current pupils develop their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills
- how well both the most able pupils and girls are progressing in mathematics

- how pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified and how much progress they are making
- the progress that pupils make in different areas of learning in the early years.
- Rates of attendance have been declining in recent years and are now below the national average. Persistent absence is too common, especially for groups of boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You now track the attendance of pupils more carefully and challenge families where attendance is too low. You hold challenging, structured conversations with parents to try to improve attendance, and have involved the attendance service on a number of occasions. Despite the apathy of a number of families who do not understand the importance of attending school regularly, you realise that reducing persistent absence must continue to be an area of intense focus. You also understand that you must make a closer link between poor attendance and pupils' overall welfare and well-being.
- You have put in place a far more structured approach to teaching phonics. This is having a positive impact on outcomes in the early years and in the phonics screening check in Year 1. Pupils are doing better each year and are now close to the national average. This, in turn, is improving standards in reading in Year 2 where more pupils are meeting the expected standard or even demonstrating a greater depth of ability.
- In key stage 2, the structured teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling is effective and is helping pupils to develop their skills and knowledge well. However, pupils do not then consistently apply what they have learned in their own writing and in other subjects, and teachers do not always have high enough expectations of them. As a result, pupils do not always present their work neatly or check that it is accurate.
- In 2016, no key stage 1 pupils demonstrated a greater depth in their learning in mathematics. Furthermore, no girls in key stage 2 achieved the higher standard in mathematics in 2016. This year, teachers and leaders have had additional training in mathematics. There is now a clearer focus on problem-solving. Pupils have the opportunity to use practical resources to help to develop their understanding, working well together to explain their reasoning to each other. Girls and boys are engaged in mathematical learning equally well and are making faster progress. However, we did together find examples where the most able mathematicians could be challenged even more.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) knows the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well. She can confidently talk about their provision and progress. She ensures that there are strong links with parents and other professionals. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities often make good progress from their starting points. Where it is not possible for pupils to catch up with age-related expectations because of their cognitive ability, they are making strong progress against their small-step targets.
- Children settle into school life quickly in the early years. They make good progress to achieve a level of development above that found nationally. Children are well prepared for Year 1. The new improved outdoor learning area is being

used with increasing effectiveness. However, there is scope to provide even more challenging physical development activities. Teachers analysed the weaknesses in expressive arts and design in 2016 and have adapted the curriculum this year to give children more opportunities to succeed when being creative.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teaching is as effective as the strongest in the school and the federation, by teachers having high expectations about the progress that pupils, especially the most able, can make
- pupils present their work neatly, and accurately apply their spelling, grammar and punctuation skills in their own writing and in all areas of the curriculum
- they continue to challenge families to ensure that their children attend regularly
- Record keeping about pupils' welfare and attendance follows the latest guidance, so that any emerging issues can be spotted quickly.

I am copying this letter to the joint chairs of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together, we visited every class to observe learning, look at pupils' work and talk to pupils about their learning. I met with you and the head of school regularly throughout the day to discuss your school self-evaluation and safeguarding. I met with the federation SENCo and two other teachers. I met with five members of the federation governing body, including the two joint chairs. I held a brief telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I spoke to a number of pupils informally at break time. I scrutinised a range of school documents, including those related to safeguarding and governance. I spoke to parents before school and considered 40 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, including many free-text comments. I considered 17 responses to the confidential staff questionnaire.