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17 July 2017

Mrs Anna Plant
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Plant

Short inspection of Aston by Sutton 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Groups of parents, pupils and governors I spoke to during the inspection recognise the improvements you, your leadership team and staff have made to the school. Your self-evaluation judges the school accurately to be good. Governors and the local authority adviser confirm that the school has continued to improve under your committed and determined leadership.

There is a welcoming and warm feel to the school, with strong relationships between staff and pupils. There is a real family ethos, which is much praised by parents, staff and pupils. Leaders and staff are determined to provide the highest quality education and, through their knowledge of each pupil, recognise when further support is required to help pupils achieve well. The learning environment is purposeful, calm and respectful. Pupils' behaviour is good and they are polite and well mannered. Parents like the fact that 'the children take care of each other' and they are very happy with all aspects of the school's provision. Parents are also delighted with the support offered to pupils transferring from pre-schools into the Reception class and from other schools during the school year. One added that their child 'was like a different child' following transfer from another school due to your efforts to get to know the family well. A governor added: 'This is a happy, well-run school with children who are happy to be here.'

Since the last inspection, your leadership team has reviewed your assessment

procedures and now uses information recorded in the assessment system, alongside pupils' progress meetings, to identify individual pupils' learning needs. Teachers devise learning activities swiftly to meet these identified needs so that no child is allowed to fall behind. The online system used by early years staff allows parents to recognise and contribute to the assessment of their child's development. This has also resulted in improved expectations of children's development in the Reception class.

Pupils state that they enjoy the friendly ethos of the school where 'everyone is nice to each other'. Parents and pupils value the range and variety of outdoor and extra-curricular activities, which include residential visits, trips and various sports and opportunities to enjoy music.

Governors recognised that, following the last inspection, they needed to become much more involved in the development and monitoring of the school's effectiveness. They audited their skills and the resulting training for the entire governing body has led to greater challenge and improved systems for holding school leaders to account. They have identified link governors who visit school regularly to gain a first-hand knowledge of the school. The governing body is now very effective in carrying out its strategic and statutory duties.

You and your team have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement since the last inspection. You have worked with your staff to improve the quality of teaching to ensure it is better matched to the pupils' abilities. You and your teachers are making good use of the school's wonderful setting by developing opportunities to learn outside. This, alongside improved teaching provision, ensures that pupils' attention and interest is sustained across lessons. Pupils show enthusiasm for science and mathematics lessons outside. During the inspection, pupils in one class were developing their art skills in the outdoor environment. You have ensured that there is sufficient challenge in lessons to make sure that pupils are engaged in their learning. As a result, the majority of pupils show good learning habits.

Staffing ratios in the early years classroom have been addressed and are now very favourable. Changes and improvements to the early years outdoor area have allowed staff to improve provision. Effective teaching and planning encourages greater opportunities for children's language and early mathematics acquisition.

Leaders have improved teaching and learning in mathematics across the school by giving pupils greater opportunities to investigate and solve problems. The school's assistant headteacher has recognised the need for further improvements in mathematics and has undertaken research into the development of pupils' reasoning skills. Pupils' books and observations in lessons show that they can apply their mathematical knowledge to a variety of real-life problems. However, while pupils' reasoning skills are improving in Years 5 and 6, they are less well developed in other years across the school. Here pupils show less confidence in explaining how and why they have used their mathematical skills to find answers.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures are robust. Records are maintained meticulously. The single central record is compliant with statutory regulations. Staff training is appropriate and up to date. Governors are also trained in basic awareness and how to follow safer recruitment systems. Partnerships with agencies to support vulnerable families are strong. Pupils feel safe in this school and parents agree.

Pupils are appropriately protected when accessing the internet. Any breaches are dealt with swiftly and sensitively. Teachers make pupils very mindful of their own personal safety through age-appropriate lessons.

Attendance rates of all pupils and groups of pupils are broadly in line with national averages. Leaders have implemented very good procedures to tackle absenteeism. However, leaders are aware that significant absence of a small number of pupils last year was due to very specific individual circumstances.

Inspection findings

- Pupils at Aston by Sutton Primary School make good progress from their starting points. Your analysis of pupils' performance and progress in 2016 was accurate and identified pupils' successes in mathematics. It also highlighted the relative weaknesses in the progress made by some groups of pupils, including the most able at key stage 2 and boys at key stage 1. The inspection focused on several key lines of enquiry, which included the progress and attainment of these two groups of pupils.
- The first key line of enquiry considered the progress and attainment of the most able pupils in reading and writing at key stage 2. Most-able pupils, particularly boys, read with intonation and confidence. They have good strategies for reading unknown words and their developing vocabulary enables them to have a good guess at their meaning. Lower-ability pupils read with less confidence in their ability to decipher unknown words. Consequently, their reading is less fluent and more disjointed. These pupils inconsistently apply phonics knowledge to unknown words.
- Strategies introduced to improve pupils' writing are beginning to have a positive impact on standards, but are not used consistently across all classes. Pupils are taught how to edit and improve their writing independently. Where these strategies have been implemented effectively, teachers have high expectations for their use and increasing numbers of the most able pupils are reaching even higher standards. In these classes, pupils' books show controlled vocabulary use, which creates the appropriate atmosphere, and improved sentence structure to create specific effects. There is an imaginative use of connectives and other linguistic devices to add interest to writing.
- Recent data shows that greater proportions of the most able pupils, particularly boys, are progressing well and attaining the higher levels of reading and writing expected in the school. However, pupils' application of phonics to spelling and reading needs to improve further.
- A second line of enquiry focused on the progress and attainment of boys at key stage 1. In 2016, progress for these pupils was significantly weaker than that of

similar pupils nationally. Most-able readers in Years 1 and 2 read a variety of texts with confidence and show good understanding of the subject matter. These pupils are able to make accurate predictions of both plot and the meaning of new words. Lower-ability pupils' reading lacks fluency as their understanding and application of phonics is not secure.

- Teaching and assessment procedures have been reviewed and improved. Leaders have used the school's tracking system to identify pupils at risk of falling behind challenging targets. Opportunities are provided for in-class support and booster sessions to meet individual and group learning needs. Pupils are aware of the rise in expectations and their work is beginning to show a positive response. During the inspection, Year 2 pupils wrote some detailed and informative writing about owls. This was well structured and sentences were punctuated appropriately. Year 1 pupils' work was weaker, with many confused by the expectations of the task. However, school data shows that, over time, key stage 1 pupils are making at least good progress in writing.
- I also considered the provision in the early years and its impact on helping children meet and exceed good levels of development. Inspection evidence shows that a number of improvements to provision are ensuring that even better teaching is meeting and challenging the learning needs of children. A good mix of child-initiated and adult-led activities challenges and supports children's development. For example, during the inspection children created an aeroplane in the construction area, chatted while they sat under the umbrella on the beach and wrote invitations to a beach party.
- Revised assessment procedures and increased staff understanding have improved the accuracy of assessments of children, and have enabled staff to better identify the next steps for each child. An online assessment system has enabled and encouraged a greater involvement of parents in their children's learning, with parents supporting teaching and learning at home.
- Children's books show good development of writing and letter formation over time. Mathematics books show good development of number work. Children can identify numbers and use addition and subtraction appropriately. As a result, 91% of children gained at least a good level of development this year. A higher proportion of boys than in previous years exceeded expected levels.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they further improve pupils' mathematical understanding by providing more opportunities for them to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics
- pupils, especially the least able, consistently apply their phonics knowledge to their reading and writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Shackleton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team, parents and four members of the governing body. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority. In addition, I talked with small groups of pupils around the school, in lessons and formally.

I observed teaching and learning in various classes jointly with the headteacher and scrutinised the writing and mathematics work of pupils across the school. In addition, I listened to pupils read.

I examined and discussed a range of documents, including those relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. I looked at the school's self-evaluation of how well it is doing, the school's improvement priorities and its assessment information. I reviewed the school's website.

I considered the views expressed by parents through informal meetings and the 31 responses to Ofsted's online survey (Parent View) as well as comments received via the free-text facility on Parent View. I also considered the 35 responses from pupils and ten responses from staff to their respective surveys.