

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



26 September 2017

Mrs Michelle Collinson
Headteacher
Biddick Hall Junior School
Chesterton Road
South Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE34 9SP

Dear Mrs Collinson

Short inspection of Biddick Hall Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 October 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 ensured that Biddick Hall Junior School is a happy, vibrant learning environment in which staff strive to provide the very best quality of education for pupils. Pupils enjoy a rich and broad curriculum which is enhanced by 'wow moments' that stimulate and capture pupils' imagination. These include frequent visitors and excursions. Teachers' high expectations ensure that pupils take great pride in all aspects of their work. Pupils' workbooks are beautifully presented and most pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning during their lessons. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and told me that there is always someone to help them with their work if they need assistance. The large majority of parents are appreciative of the work you do and have confidence that you will act quickly to address any issues they raise.

Since the previous inspection, you have worked relentlessly to raise the achievement of pupils across the school. Your unswerving focus has paid off. The proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, reaching the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics has risen and is above the national average by the time pupils leave the school. In particular, those pupils who have low prior attainment are supported skilfully to catch up rapidly, and many reach the expected standard for their age by Year 6. This ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. You have carefully navigated your staff team through the increased demands of the revised national curriculum. This has ensured that the improved outcomes for pupils have been sustained

throughout a period of national change.

You have developed a strong team of leaders who share your ambition for the school. You and your leadership team have the full confidence of your staff, who feel valued and supported professionally. This has enabled you to improve the quality of teaching across the curriculum over time. This is particularly the case in writing, where extremely effective teaching is securing strong progress from pupils in most classes. As a consequence, pupils' attainment in writing has continued to rise and is high by the time they reach Year 6.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the proportion of pupils reaching the highest standards of attainment in mathematics. More teachers are setting work at just the right level for pupils' abilities. However, you recognise that there is still more to do to ensure that some pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make faster progress to reach the highest standards of attainment in mathematics and also in reading. You have already begun to address this through your school development plan. While your plan is focused on the correct strategic priorities, the targets set are not sufficiently precise to enable governors to check on the impact of your work fully.

Safeguarding is effective.

You take personal responsibility for ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff throughout the school have experienced a comprehensive programme of training which ensures that they fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively. Adults are, for example, knowledgeable about the signs and symptoms of radicalisation. They act swiftly to raise any concerns about pupils' safety. When pupils appear to be at risk, safeguarding records show that you take prompt action to engage with external agencies to keep pupils safe.

The curriculum provides regular opportunities to help pupils to keep themselves safe. Pupils have a good understanding of how to use the internet safely. The 'Stay Safe' focus week empowers pupils to take action where they have concerns about bullying. Pupils report that when, occasionally, bullying occurs, or pupils behave inappropriately, they have faith that the adults in school will help them to resolve matters.

You are aware that, over time, pupils' attendance has not improved quickly enough and remains just below the national average. You have worked to address this, including refusing to authorise term-time holidays, and have liaised with the local authority to take legal action where you have deemed it appropriate. A recent project has helped to reduce the persistent absence of pupils who are eligible for support for their special educational needs. However, you recognise that there is more to do so that all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, attend well.

Inspection findings

- Over time, the standards reached by pupils in writing have increased sharply and are well above average. Staff have benefited from training and support from the leader for English and from the local authority. Teachers model high-quality writing exceptionally well. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to write at length, in different subjects and for different purposes. Leaders have undertaken frequent checks and worked with other schools to ensure that teachers assess pupils' writing accurately. A more recent focus on developing and extending pupils' vocabulary is beginning to pay off. Pupils are encouraged to develop flair and originality through the use of figurative language. This was evident during a Year 6 lesson where one pupil wrote, 'Stars glimmer with elegance as they beg for attention; they yearn to rule the sky'.
- At the previous inspection, you were tasked with improving pupils' reading skills. A higher than average proportion of pupils now reach the expected standard for their age. All staff have been trained to teach phonics. Where pupils join the school unable to decode reading material fluently, they are now supported to make rapid progress and catch up very quickly. A new programme is enabling pupils to widen their independent reading at home and in school. Pupils' workbooks show that they have regular opportunities to develop their reading comprehension skills. However, the tasks teachers set to develop pupils' ability to infer and deduce meaning from texts do not always demand enough of pupils. You recognise that more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, need to reach the highest standard of attainment in reading by the time they reach Year 6.
- The standards attained by pupils in mathematics have risen and the proportion reaching the expected standard for their age is well above the national average. You have invested in additional resources to help teachers to plan work which is more carefully matched to pupils' needs. Pupils have more opportunities to solve tricky problems. The vast majority of pupils have secured a strong basic knowledge of number facts, which enables them to calculate with fluency and accuracy. You know that you still need to increase the proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, who reach the higher standards of attainment. Your mathematics leader has already begun to address this. Pupils' workbooks show that teachers are beginning to provide more opportunities for pupils to explore and explain their mathematical reasoning.
- You have invested in the development of a team of effective and efficient leaders who are supporting you well to improve the school. The deputy headteacher and leaders of English and mathematics play a significant role in monitoring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have benefited from observing lessons jointly with you to ensure that they are accurately judging the impact of what they see. They are appreciative of the support from the local authority, which has helped them to review the quality of pupils' learning in workbooks. This has enabled them to support and challenge teachers to continually improve their practice.
- Governors are highly committed to the school and rightly have confidence in the

team of leaders and staff. They receive regular updates and performance information from the headteacher and the local authority. However, governors do not always have a sufficiently clear view of the school's strategic priorities for improvement. Targets set in the school development plan are not sufficiently well defined. As a consequence, governors are not making best use of this tool to keep a check on the improvements within the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, reach the highest levels of attainment in reading and mathematics
- targets set in the school development plan are precise and measurable, so that governors can undertake regular and careful checks on the impact of leaders' work to improve the school
- attendance, including that of disadvantaged pupils, improves to be at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I also met with the chair of the governing board and three other governors. I conducted a telephone meeting with a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. I observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I spoke to pupils during their lessons and met with a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. You presented information in relation to pupils' progress, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking on the performance of teachers. I reviewed the work in a sample of pupils' books. Documents relating to your work to safeguard pupils, including records of incidents, were checked. I reviewed the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the six responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 14 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.