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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Sue Stringman
Headteacher
Dulverton Primary School
Dulverton Road
New Eltham
London
SE9 3RH

Dear Mrs Stringman

Short inspection of Dulverton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Despite unforeseen changes in the senior leadership team, you, your staff and the governing body have remained focused on ensuring that pupils enjoy school, feel safe and achieve well. I found that pupils' positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour play a key role in ensuring that they make good progress. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and supportive. As one pupil put it: 'Teachers are really friendly at this school and they help us. They show us how to be friendly to each other and to help each other.'

You and your leadership team have accurately evaluated the school's effectiveness. You are clear about the strengths and what needs to be better. As a result, your efforts are driving improvement and you prioritise the right areas. For example, you have taken effective action to improve pupils' progress in writing across key stage 2. Nevertheless, you and your team are clear that there is further work to do to ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds make more substantial progress to enable them to achieve in greater depth. As a result, you have introduced strategies and training for teachers to raise the standards that these pupils achieve.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their pupils well. As a result, they plan learning that helps pupils make good progress. However, teachers' questioning does not consistently probe pupils' understanding or help them to deepen their thinking. While you have already worked hard to improve this, you rightly say that more work is needed to embed the improvements.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, including the governing body, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff training is up to date and all staff are regularly reminded about their duties to safeguard pupils. As a result, all staff know, understand and follow the current statutory guidance in safeguarding pupils' welfare. Clear processes are in place to ensure that staff identify and report any concerns promptly. Records of concerns are detailed and of high quality, which enables you to build an accurate picture of pupils' needs. Leaders work effectively with outside agencies and liaise with them quickly in order to keep pupils safe.

Leaders complete all the required checks to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work in the school. They record these checks accurately on the single central record. Governors carry out frequent checks on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements to ensure that pupils are kept safe and procedures are strengthened where necessary.

Pupils feel safe and well-cared-for in school. As one pupil said: 'I like this school because it is really safe.' Pupils say they understand the importance of making sensible choices to stay safe in a variety of situations, including when they are online. Pupils have a good awareness of different forms of bullying and know they can talk to any member of staff in the school if they have a concern. They report that any issues 'get sorted out'. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children feel happy and safe in school.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry for the inspection focused on leaders' actions to reduce persistent absence and, in particular, how leaders monitor and secure the welfare of pupils who are frequently absent from school. Overall absence and persistent absence rates are below national averages for most groups of pupils. However, persistent absence rates for pupils eligible for free school meals have been high in recent years.
- I found that you have taken effective action to improve attendance rates for those pupils eligible for free school meals. Staff monitor attendance carefully and are quick to identify pupils where absence is a concern. You and your team work closely with parents to understand the reasons why pupils are not attending school as regularly as they should, as well as to tailor support to their individual circumstances. Equally, you communicate clearly your high expectations for regular attendance and are ready to challenge families, where appropriate, to ensure that their children's attendance improves.
- For the second line of enquiry, I focused on the achievement of the most able disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2. In the 2016 key stage 2 assessments, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving the higher standard was below that of other pupils nationally, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- You accurately identified that, in the past, too few disadvantaged pupils were making the substantial progress necessary to achieve the higher standards. In response, you

and your team have strengthened the curriculum to ensure that the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are routinely stretched in their learning.

- Teachers now plan activities for pupils to extend their writing and mathematical skills in a range of curriculum subjects. For example, in science, pupils write about their findings from investigations. Teachers' clear expectations ensure that pupils apply their knowledge consistently. As a result, they produce writing that is of a high quality.
- Work in pupils' books shows that the teaching of writing routinely challenges most-able pupils. Pupils use their knowledge of grammar and punctuation to record their ideas accurately, using a variety of sentence structures, including complex sentences. They are confident in making ambitious vocabulary choices and consider carefully the effect these will have on the reader.
- In mathematics, you have ensured that teaching gives greater emphasis to supporting pupils in developing their problem-solving skills. During my visits to lessons, pupils were keen to do well and spoke enthusiastically about how they enjoy working out the answers. Although teachers typically set tasks that match pupils' abilities, they do not consistently challenge pupils' understanding through asking probing questions. You and your team are supporting teachers to develop their questioning skills. However, you are clear that more work needs to be done to ensure that this approach is embedded across the school.
- The third area we agreed to consider was around the impact of leaders' work to improve girls' achievement in key stage 1. In the 2016 key stage 1 assessments, girls' progress in reading, writing and mathematics was not as strong as that of other girls, nationally. You and the leadership team were quick to identify this and have introduced a variety of strategies to secure improvements in girls' outcomes.
- You and your team have rightly prioritised that girls develop secure reading skills in Years 1 and 2 through a variety of strategies, including by your employing a specialist teacher. As a result, girls of all abilities read fluently and with expression, using their phonics knowledge to help them tackle unfamiliar words. They use a range of strategies to understand the meaning of what they read and can explain why they enjoy it. For example, one girl explained, 'I like David Walliams' books because they are funny.'
- I also established that girls' writing skills are built up swiftly. They progress quickly from writing in simple sentences to being able to use more complex words and sentences effectively. They use a range of punctuation accurately and their handwriting is cursive and neat. In mathematics, they routinely tackle more demanding calculations and problems.
- As a result of the changes you and your team have made, girls are making stronger progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is also evident in your assessment information.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers consistently use questioning carefully to probe pupils' responses, so that their learning is deepened and they better understand new learning.

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

Yours sincerely

David Lloyd
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the deputy head teacher and other senior leaders, as well as four members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair. I visited lessons with you and reviewed work in pupils' books, including the most able disadvantaged and girls. I listened to pupils read in Years 1, 2, 5 and 6. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and at playtime. I talked to pupils about their learning and talked with them informally in the playground. I talked with a range of staff. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school improvement plan, the school self-evaluation documents, safeguarding records, information about attendance and exclusions, and information about current pupils' achievement. I considered 62 responses to Parent View.