

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Gill Young  
Headteacher  
Alexander First School  
Kenneally  
Oakley Green  
Windsor  
Berkshire  
SL4 4XP

Dear Mrs Young

### **Short inspection of Alexander First School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 June 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your assistant headteacher know the school and its unique challenges very well. Your shared determination to help every pupil to achieve their very best is reflected in your staff's commitment to their work. Staff are proud to work at your school, and value the useful training and support they receive to help them do their best for all of the pupils. Parents are highly positive about their children's experiences in the school, and how well pupils' pastoral as well as academic needs are met. One parent summed it up by saying, 'Staff are patient, kind and caring.'

Many of the pupils at your school are from service families. This means that pupils are often enrolled at the school only for a short period of time. You and your staff recognise the academic difficulties that this often presents for pupils, as well as the personal challenges faced by them and their families. You work tirelessly to ensure that every pupil is supported effectively, so that they can settle quickly and easily into the life of the school. This helps pupils to make good progress with their learning and fill the gaps in their knowledge that are often evident when they join the school.

You, your staff and the governors have a shared and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and development priorities. You have persevered with acting on the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection, despite a number of

complex challenges that have required sensitive handling. These issues, linked to school staffing and army deployment, have contributed to outcomes by the end of early years and key stage 1 not being as strong in 2017 as you had striven for. However, since the last inspection, standards have improved steadily, and progress of pupils currently in the school is good. You recognise that there is further work to do to increase the proportion of pupils who reach at least the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. The key to this is ensuring that pupils who join the school other than at the start of the early years, and who have below-average prior attainment, make rapid progress. You also know that continued persistence is needed to ensure that all pupils come to school as regularly as they should.

Many pupils are working below age-related expectations when they arrive at your school. They need intensive support to develop their early vocabulary and mark-making skills, so that they have a secure starting point for learning how to read and write well. Improving outcomes by the end of the early years from 2014 to 2016 show that pupils who join the school during the Reception Year are now typically well prepared for their key stage 1 learning.

Changes to how mathematics and writing are taught are strengthening this aspect of the school's work. The mathematics 'mastery' curriculum enables staff to ensure that pupils who join the school mid-year fill the gaps in their learning quickly, while others whose learning is more secure are challenged to deepen their understanding. A similar approach is developing in writing, where staff focus on making sure that pupils express their creative ideas with grammatical accuracy. 'Fix-it time' is providing pupils with useful opportunities to revisit and improve their work, using helpful feedback from their teachers, although this is not routinely established across all classes.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pastoral care is a strength of the school. Pupils were unanimous in telling me that they feel safe and that staff listen to them. Their matter-of-fact descriptions of how adults help them with any worries that they may have demonstrated how secure the culture of safeguarding is. Pupils who join the school at different times are helped to settle in quickly, with staff managing their needs sensitively while encouraging high expectations for learning. Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe in an age-appropriate way. They described how to keep themselves safe from 'stranger danger', including when they are using the internet. They say that bullying does not happen in their school, and that instances of unkindness are dealt with well by trusted adults.

The ethos of safeguarding is underpinned securely by policies and practices within the school. Leaders ensure that adults working in the school are appropriately vetted, and careful records are kept. Staff receive effective training that ensures that they understand their safeguarding duties and are able to carry them out with diligence. Leaders act swiftly and persistently to address any concerns that arise about a pupil, working closely with outside agencies to provide pupils and their

families with effective support. Their records of this work are detailed and accurate.

## **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection, we focused on: how well leaders, specifically governors, fulfil their duties and support school improvement; how effectively teaching in key stage 1 is leading to consistently strong outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics; and whether pupils are making consistently good progress from their individual starting points. We also considered leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance.
- Leaders, governors and staff have a clear and shared understanding of aspects of the school's priorities for improvement. Leaders work closely with the local authority to access high-quality opportunities for staff development. Expectations for staff to share and apply what they learn to their daily work ensure that this training is improving the quality of teaching over time.
- Since the last inspection, the governing body has been restructured to support its effectiveness. A number of governors are new to the governing body, and the two co-chairs of governors have only just taken up their roles. Governors bring an appropriate range of expertise and skills, which enables them to be effective in their role. They are currently working to ensure that their established and effective systems and working practices remain securely in place following the recent changes to the governing body's personnel.
- Over time, effective teaching has secured strong outcomes in reading. Leaders have identified what has prevented pupils from achieving as well in writing and mathematics in the past. Adapted learning programmes which address this by deepening learning are now established in mathematics and developing in writing. This is supporting individual pupils in filling the gaps in their prior learning, and therefore making strong progress from their individual starting points.
- Across the school, routinely high expectations for learning and behaviour are evident. Pupils engage with their work, responding well to teachers' questioning that draws out their understanding. Pupils are encouraged to use helpful resources that are available in their classroom, and that develop their independence as learners. Leaders are creative and persistent in looking for opportunities to involve parents and carers in their children's learning, so that work in lessons can be supported well at home.
- After secure improvements in pupils' achievements over the past few years, outcomes in 2017 were lower across a number of measures. Leaders can account for this 'dip' in performance and the unusual combination of factors that contributed to it. However, pupils, including those who were only at the school for a short period of time, typically made at least good progress from their individual starting points.
- Many pupils arrive at the school after the start of the early years, and with gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Staff work effectively with pupils to help them to catch up quickly, even if they are not at the school for a long time. Pupils currently in the school are making consistently secure and rapid progress across

reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders recognise that it is vital to sustain this rate of progress, so that increasing numbers of pupils reach at least age-related expectations by the time that they leave the school.

- Leaders expect pupils to come to school regularly. They celebrate pupils who attend well and/or improve their attendance. Their useful work with the army and education welfare teams is helping pupils to attend more regularly. Leaders recognise the need to persevere tenaciously with this work, so that potentially vulnerable pupils, specifically the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, attend increasingly regularly.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, particularly those considered to be vulnerable, improve their attendance further, so that they come to school as often as they should
- actions to strengthen the teaching of writing and mathematics translate pupils' strong progress into secure outcomes, so that pupils are prepared well for their academic next steps.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your assistant headteacher, two representatives of the local authority, and groups of staff, governors and pupils. Together, you and I visited all the classes, with the assistant headteacher joining us when we went to the early years. We looked at some examples of pupils' mathematics and English work in a sample of books from a range of year groups. I also considered a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, information and policies on the school website, and pupil performance information. I reviewed the central record of recruitment checks, the safeguarding policy, and leaders' records relating to child protection. To consider wider views of the school, I took into account six responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, including six free-text responses. I spoke informally to parents in the playground at the start of the day, and reviewed 70 responses to a paper survey provided by the school. Finally, I considered questionnaire responses from seven pupils and 13 staff.