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16 October 2017

Mr Giovanni Gaidoni
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gaidoni

Short inspection of Fairfields Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. I was impressed by the learning environment that you and your staff have created, with attractive displays and celebration of pupils' work and achievements. A sense of order and routine is apparent. Under your calm and reflective leadership, you have continued to look for ways to improve the school. Supported well by your long-serving deputy headteacher, you are dedicated to ensuring that pupils succeed. One parent summed up the view of many: 'I feel the school has done wonders for my three children and they have thrived in each school year.'

Governors have an accurate view of what is working well and what could be improved further still. They hold you effectively to account for the academic and welfare needs of pupils. They ensure that additional funds and resources are well spent so that vulnerable pupils receive the help and support they need. Currently, the governing body is smaller than usual due to some vacancies. Nevertheless, governors fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. They continue to visit the school frequently to check the accuracy of the information they receive.

You have maintained the many strengths that were identified at the time of the previous inspection. Standards of attainment continue to be higher than the national average by the end of key stage 2. Many pupils leave school reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2017, the proportion of pupils who

reached the expected and higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was also above the national average.

Pupils spoken with during the inspection were polite and articulate. They are keen and enthusiastic in their learning. They particularly enjoy the challenges they receive in mathematics, where they choose their own starting points in activities. Most pupils who responded to their online questionnaire agreed that they are challenged in many lessons. Pupils' achievement in mathematics was a particular feature in 2017 at key stage 2. The proportion of pupils who made good or better progress was above that found nationally.

Staff are equally proud to work at the school. Those who responded to the staff questionnaire consider that they are supported well by school leaders and provided with the relevant training they need to improve further. This is because you have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for further development in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Children start well at Fairfields Primary School and Nursery. The early years provision is a strength. Children are happy and very well cared for in a safe and welcoming environment. From the youngest child, they enjoy the many activities that enable them to develop their skills and abilities across all areas of the early years curriculum. As a result, children make good progress over their time in Nursery and in Reception.

The mark of your strong leadership is how well you keep improving and set precise goals to achieve. Your improvement plans accurately identify that you still want pupils to excel further in key stage 1, especially those who are most able and the most able disadvantaged.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory expectations. You take appropriate precautions to ensure that pupils are safe at school. You have established a strong safeguarding culture by training and developing staff and governors in the most up-to-date national safeguarding guidance.

All parents and staff who responded to their questionnaires agreed that pupils are safe. The vast majority of parents value the high priority staff place on ensuring that their children are well looked after. One parent commented, 'We are happy that our son feels safe, and the teachers are all very good and informative.' Another stated, 'Without question, staff look after my children well.'

Recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff. Leaders and governors are rigorous in carrying out the necessary recruitment checks. Documents and school records are meticulously kept.

All pupils who responded to the pupil questionnaire stated that if bullying occurs, then staff deal with it well. A few parents expressed concern, through the online questionnaire, that they considered behaviour issues were not dealt with well enough. During the inspection, pupils showed a clear understanding of what bullying is and what it is not. School leaders take any issues of poorer behaviour seriously and investigate them fully. Leaders' changes to the whole-school recording system for behaviour and safeguarding issues are proving effective in reducing incidents and in communicating swiftly should an incident occur.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I explored how well leaders ensure that the most able pupils, and those who are the most able disadvantaged, work at greater depth in key stage 1. This was because in 2016 the proportion of pupils who reached greater depth was below the national average and did not represent good progress for some pupils from their high starting points.
- In 2017, pupils' results show that more pupils achieved greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics. This was equally true for disadvantaged pupils. Currently, pupils in key stage 1 have settled quickly into the routines and high expectations set for them. Leadership of key stage 1 is now the responsibility of the deputy headteacher. She has already identified that pupils' handwriting and pencil control are not as effective as they should be.
- Firm plans are in place to implement a whole-school procedure for pupils to gain greater proficiency with their handwriting skills at a much younger age. You recognise that pupils can make faster progress across key stage 1 from their high starting points. Pupils' achievement in the Year 1 phonics screening check was below that nationally in 2017. This was a dip in performance. In previous years, the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard had been at least in line with that nationally. You have wasted no time in reorganising how sounds are taught, so that pupils once again receive the best opportunity to be successful.
- My second line of enquiry was to check how well disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress and attend well. The numbers of disadvantaged pupils are lower than found nationally, so I wanted to see how precisely their needs are met.
- You responded swiftly when disadvantaged pupils did not make as much progress as other key stage 2 pupils nationally in 2016. Disadvantaged pupils are well provided for, either through additional one-to-one support in class or well-considered group work. They receive the precise feedback that they need to make good progress. As a result, in 2017 disadvantaged pupils made more progress than other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. You clearly identify the barriers for learning disadvantaged pupils face. You provide a wide range of help and practical support for parents, such as ensuring that pupils have a place in the breakfast and after-school clubs. Another way you support pupils is by paying for additional music tuition for pupils who show an aptitude to learning an instrument. The recently appointed coordinator for pupils who have

special educational needs and/or disabilities has brought additional strength and capacity to the leadership team. Already there have been changes to the way that the progress for these pupils is checked, so that their needs can be provided for effectively. In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made more progress than other pupils nationally.

- Attendance for these vulnerable groups was in the lowest 10% nationally in 2016, and persistent absenteeism for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was in the highest 10% nationally. Where pupils do not attend school as well as you expect, staff follow the school's procedures diligently. Parents are supported or challenged to increase their child's attendance. As a result, whole-school attendance is now in line with national averages and some disadvantaged pupils attend school more frequently as a consequence of your intervention. In 2017, 153 pupils achieved 100% attendance, and this figure is far greater than the number who were regularly absent from school. You celebrate good attendance, and the weekly class attendance certificate is well received.
- My next line of enquiry was to consider whether the quality of education in early years is a particular strength. This is because, in the previous inspection, there was not a separate judgement made about the quality of education in early years. Also, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception has been above that nationally for a number of years.
- Adults provide an engaging and stimulating curriculum for the early years children, both inside the classroom and in the outdoor area. Children play well together and enjoy the many activities, from playing with sand to riding bicycles. One parent summed up the view of others: 'My daughter comes home singing songs and rhymes she has learned and is applying her knowledge of phonics in our daily home life.'
- The leadership of the early years is strong. Parents appreciate the availability of the early years leader at the start of the school day so that they can discuss any concerns or questions they may have. As a result, children have settled easily and well into school life. Children start school with skills and abilities that are mostly typical for their age. In 2017, the proportion of children who left Reception achieving a good level of development continued to be above the national average. The proportion of children exceeding in some areas of learning also continues to increase year-on-year. Children are well prepared for Year 1.
- My final line of enquiry was to explore how well pupils progress in other subjects across the curriculum. This was because in science in 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard at key stage 1 was strong. However, in 2016, at key stage 2, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who reached the required standard in science was lower than that found nationally, even though these pupils met the standard in English and mathematics.
- Leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics monitor the coverage of their curriculum areas effectively. They ensure that pupils receive a broad experience across the curriculum. Pupils have trips or workshops to help build their knowledge and understanding of a topic. For example, recently Year 4 pupils participated in a day of workshops to begin their learning of the ancient

Egyptians. Pupils told me how much they enjoy these activities. Parents equally commented on the value that these additional experiences give to the social and academic development of their children. Staff use your additional and well-designed studio often during and after school so that pupils can practise their skills in dance and music. The art room is used frequently so pupils develop their creative skills when carrying out activities such as moulding clay. In sport, adults and pupils alike enjoy the many sporting events they participate in with other local schools. Pupils compete in local events and are proud of their successes in netball, athletics and football.

- Your recent analysis shows that there is little difference in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school in subjects such as science, physical education and history. This year you have identified that pupils require more opportunities to develop their scientific investigative skills further. In 2017, pupils' achievement in science at both key stage 1 and key stage 2 was just above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of handwriting improves, so that pupils form their letters correctly from a younger age
- the proportion of pupils who reach the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check is consistently in line with the national average
- the proportion of most-able and most-able disadvantaged pupils achieving greater depth by the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics is at least in line with national averages
- the attendance of all groups of pupils is in line with national averages, so that no group is disadvantaged by poor attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Over the course of the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior and subject leaders and the chair of governors to discuss the progress of the school since the previous inspection.

- I gathered a wide range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included short observations of lessons, jointly with you and other senior leaders, in all classes and sampling a range of pupils' current work in books. The teaching of phonics was seen in Reception.
- I spoke to a number of pupils informally in classrooms to gather their views about school.
- I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the school's self-evaluation and plans for future improvement, governors' minutes, attendance and pupils' achievement.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies.
- I took account of 46 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 22 responses parents provided using the free-text service. The views of staff were considered from nine responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire, together with 45 responses from pupils to their questionnaire.