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Miss Trudy Cotchin
Principal
The Arbours Primary Academy
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Dear Miss Cotchin

Short inspection of The Arbours Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 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 December 2014.

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 the other leaders are diligent, committed and have high expectations of all pupils. Together, you have created a vibrant school community where the values are at the forefront of everyone's mind. Pupils know what is expected of them. Staff continually remind pupils about the importance of positive conduct and working hard. They do this through school assemblies, lessons and school rewards. For example, pupils who spoke with me recognised that 'collaboration' is an important school value. They know they must work together to create a positive school environment.

Throughout the school, the importance of learning is a high priority. For example, pupils are taught the skills to manage their learning effectively by 'The Arbours Learning Pit'. Consequently, pupils are resilient and manage learning challenges well. Teachers make learning fun and interesting. Pupils collaborate with each other and have positive relationships with all staff.

Since the previous inspection, the school has made better use of assessment information. Teachers in key stage 1 use it to plan work that provides pupils with the right level of challenge. Teachers, working alongside phase leaders, ensure that assessment information is moderated rigorously. They meet frequently to discuss pupils' learning and ensure that their needs are being met. Leaders make regular checks on pupils' learning. These ensure that tasks provide them with enough

challenge and support. Teachers give clear explanations of learning tasks and check that pupils have the right resources to help them learn. In 2017, the national assessment results at the end of key stage 1 were better in reading, writing and mathematics than in the previous year.

You and the deputy head teacher are two of the local authority's moderators for assessment in key stages 1 and 2. You value the importance of moderation activities, both in school and among other trust schools. You work closely with other schools in your local area. You appreciate the importance of collaboration and of building links with a broad range of schools in a range of contexts.

You and other staff have introduced a new curriculum programme. Where possible, teachers use topic time to help pupils build and practise their key skills, particularly in writing and mathematics. Throughout the school, pupils use and apply their skills across a wide range of subjects. Topics in history and geography enable pupils to practise their writing skills. For example, one pupil wrote vivid descriptions of Mayan gods. Pupils use their writing and mathematics skills to explore science topics such as the human body.

During our visit to the early years, we saw children enjoying their learning and developing their skills. The acting early years leader has ensured that there is a broad range of activities, both inside and outside. Staff in the early years assess children's skills when they first join the school so that they have an accurate baseline. From this, staff plan and deliver appropriate learning activities. In 2017, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development increased since the previous year.

Attendance has been too low and too many pupils have been persistently absent. You have increased the number of family support workers who provide personalised support for families. Attendance information is monitored carefully and the school responds quickly to pupils' absence. Pupils are reminded in school assemblies about the importance of regular school attendance. As a result, persistent absence has reduced considerably for all pupil groups. The level of attendance has increased this academic year and is now marginally below the national average. You plan to continue the school's work with parents in this area to raise attendance further.

The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has improved year on year. It has not yet reached the national average. You and the leader for phonics have recognised that this is a key priority area. You have ensured that all staff are well trained in teaching phonics and you continue to check the quality of their teaching.

You and the mathematics leader recognise that too few pupils are reaching the expected and higher standard in mathematics at the end of key stage 2. In 2017, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected and higher standard at the end of key stage 2 were lower than in the previous year. You are introducing a new mathematics programme to deal with this. The mathematics leader checks regularly on the quality of teaching and learning. She provides precise feedback to help

teachers plan tasks that challenge pupils sufficiently. Teachers' expertise in the new programme is improving and pupils are beginning to make accelerated progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's comprehensive safeguarding policy is consistently applied. This ensures that pupils are kept safe. Where staff have concerns, you provide individualised support to pupils. You work well in partnership with external agencies to ensure that specialist help is provided where needed. Staff make prompt referrals when they have any concerns. Leaders are vigilant in following up any further actions needed with external agencies.

The governing body has a secure understanding of its safeguarding responsibilities. Governors carry out their duties rigorously and have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They regularly check the implementation of the school's policy and ensure that the recruitment records meet requirements. Records are detailed and of high quality. Governors support leaders in identifying aspects of practice that can be strengthened and routinely check that these improvements have been made.

Pupils I met during my visit said that they are happy at school and know whom they would go to if they had a problem. They know how to stay safe online and spoke fluently about how they could reduce online risks. Pupils say that bullying is rare but if it does happen they trust staff to deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils told me how the school teaches them to be respectful and tolerant of differences. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Inspection findings

- You are keen to deliver the best provision possible so that all pupils succeed. You make clear to staff your exceptionally high expectations of all pupils.
- The school's self-evaluation is highly comprehensive and based on a wide range of evidence. You have clear action plans in place. The leadership team checks the quality of teaching and learning effectively so there is continued improvement.
- The school is a vibrant and enjoyable place to be. Pupils are well behaved and are caring towards each other. They are proud of their school and work their hardest. They have a clear understanding of how to stay safe. For example, pupils explained in great detail the importance of not sharing personal information on the internet.
- Staff show all pupils warmth and consideration. Pupils are well cared for and their individual needs are a high priority. The deputy headteacher expertly leads a welfare team that provides a range of support. Every morning, family support workers greet parents as they bring their children to school. They provide tailored support to meet the needs of families and their children. Good communication between the deputy headteacher and a range of staff ensures that provision is consistent.
- Teaching throughout the early years and key stage 1 is effective. You use

accurate assessment information to provide additional learning groups. These help lower-attaining pupils, particularly boys, to catch up and achieve at similar levels to girls. Pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 1 increased in 2017.

- The leaders of reading and writing work together to provide many opportunities for pupils to practise their key skills. The school has introduced a topic-based curriculum to ensure that the curriculum is vibrant and interesting. Pupils enjoy their interactive entry and exit days to topics. The reading and writing leaders work together to ensure that opportunities to practise reading and writing skills across the curriculum are included in teachers' planning. They check the quality of learning closely. They have developed group reading activities and provided training to build up teachers' expertise.
- Pupils are taught phonic skills well. You are committed to improving this provision further and have agreed this as an area of development for the school. Careful checks on pupils' achievements mean that staff can adjust learning to meet pupils' needs precisely.
- You have a comprehensive enrichment programme that includes parent and child projects and language courses. Reading and grammar workshops help improve parents' skills. You work hard to engage parents in the life of the school. Attendance at these events is improving steadily.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff work to increase parents' engagement with their child's learning and their understanding of the importance of daily school attendance
- teachers build up pupils' phonic skills so that a greater proportion of pupils achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1
- teachers provide tasks that consistently challenge pupils so that a greater proportion of pupils make rapid progress by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Nuttall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the chair of governors, including a telephone conversation with a representative of the trust. I spoke with the reading and writing leaders, mathematics and science. I spoke with parents before school and a group of pupils about their school experience. You and I jointly visited a range of classes and we sampled pupils' books. In addition, I scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the single central register (the school's record of safeguarding recruitment checks on staff). I evaluated the school's documentation in relation to pupils' achievement, improvement planning and attendance. I looked at the minutes of meetings of the governing body. I took account of the six responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. There were no responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text service. There were also no responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff or pupils.