

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



8 December 2017

Mrs S Dalby
Headteacher
The Alderton Infant School
Alderton Hall Lane
Loughton
Essex
IG10 3HE

Dear Mrs Dalby

Short inspection of The Alderton Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. There have been considerable changes to the school and its staffing complement during the last four years. The school's roll has increased to accommodate a third class in each year group. You have, therefore, had to increase the number of staff required while also overseeing a considerable building project. Only 40% of your current staff were at the school at the time of the previous inspection. There has also been a sharp rise in the proportion of vulnerable pupils, be they those who have specific learning needs or those who are disadvantaged. However, you have ensured that pupils' progress remains the key priority, and this is borne out by their results over time.

It was an absolute pleasure to be with the pupils in a school which they feel is 'fun, fantastic', and where such activities as pottery and high-quality music provision are regularly on the timetable. You and your staff have created a calm, stimulating environment where 'sparkling behaviours' are regularly celebrated. In every class, pupils excitedly talked about their learning as they confidently discussed with their classmates, for example, how human beings grow. Despite often low starting points, children quickly settle in the Reception classes, talking happily with visitors. One boy asked me politely, 'Can you help me with my apron please?' Such courtesy is evident throughout the school. Pupils show great care for each other and enjoy celebrating each other's successes. In one class, one pupil said to another about his drawing, 'Don't rub it out – it is beautiful.' These examples are far from isolated. Parent after parent who responded by text to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent

View, said that their children are happy, safe and well cared for at Alderton Infants. As one parent said, 'It is a lovely school where my child is thriving', while another commented, 'Children are nurtured, cared for, treated with kindness, and taught valuable morals and principles.'

The previous inspection report asked the school to accelerate pupils' progress by making good use of teaching assistants, increasing opportunities to apply investigative skills in mathematics, and ensuring that pupils know what they need to improve on in mathematics. You have ensured that your high expectations are clearly understood by all staff. The training and support that you have offered to teachers and teaching assistants have undoubtedly prepared them well for both the changes in the national curriculum and the challenges that a growing number of pupils face in their learning. Teaching assistants very effectively support, guide and sensitively step in to ensure that pupils concentrate hard on what they are learning. They use questions very well to encourage very thoughtful responses from some of the most vulnerable pupils. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress from their various starting points.

You and your senior leaders have worked hard to ensure that teachers are supported in being able to teach the demands of the new mathematics curriculum. With the aid of appropriate support from a local authority consultant, the mathematics subject lead has provided many opportunities and resources to encourage pupils to use their mathematics skills in everyday problem-solving. A considerable and growing number of parents regularly attend early morning activities in both mathematics and reading, which are proving very popular. Although you agree that you will want to see fewer worksheets in pupils' books, it is clear that practical activities are very regular and show pupils' progress from Reception to the end of Year 2. Teachers routinely apply the school's marking and feedback policy, in which pupils' next steps in their learning are made clear. In some books, pupils are beginning to respond by correcting their work or showing their working out.

Leaders and governors make clear the school's position on taking holidays in school time, and do everything they can to support families. Despite this, there remains a stubborn core of parents who choose not to adhere to the school's policy and to whom governors do not hesitate to issue fines. Equally, some parents do not ensure that their children arrive at school on time. Together, you and I saw examples of where absence and regular lateness have definitely played a part in some pupils' slower progress. As one pupil tellingly said, 'You miss learning new things and also the fun too.' You and your governors remain wholeheartedly committed to ensuring that pupils attend school regularly and on time, and you already have further actions you are planning to take.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and 100% of parents who responded to Parent View agree that their children are safe and well cared for at school. You should be proud of such comments by parents as, 'The head has made it feel like

you join a family when you start at the school.' This sentiment is also reflected in the overwhelmingly positive staff survey. You have created a culture of care and vigilance and are passionate about ensuring that pupils and parents feel safe, both physically and emotionally. You are doggedly determined to follow up with external agencies any concerns you have about children or pupils. Record-keeping is of high quality and charts well any concerns from staff, actions taken and ongoing monitoring.

You continue to work very closely with specialist teachers and other professionals to ensure that the rising proportion of pupils with complex needs and those who are disadvantaged are supported in the best way possible. For example, access to a family support worker and a counsellor has had a considerable impact on some pupils' attendance and their mental health. Consequently, and particularly for some disadvantaged pupils, pupils' progress is good and their readiness to learn vastly improved. The further impact has been on families. As one parent said, 'We are always able to meet with the teachers if we have any concerns, which are quickly and professionally dealt with.'

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, and in order to ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was how well teaching and learning ensure that all pupils make good progress from their varying starting points. This was because this was an area for improvement in your previous inspection report.
- Leaders monitor teaching and learning effectively. Despite there being a considerable change to staff since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good from Reception to the end of Year 2. Although this has not been easy to maintain in an area where recruitment of teachers is a challenge, your determination that pupils at Alderton Infants get 'only the best' has paid off. You have sought appropriate support and training both from experienced staff and external consultants to ensure that teachers are well prepared to teach the higher expectations of the national curriculum. As a result, teachers' mathematics subject knowledge is strong. They plan well for pupils to explore practical problem-solving activities reflecting real-life situations.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are strengths of the school. This does not happen by chance. The strategies to promote good behaviour are used consistently well by all staff. From, 'Everybody stop, hands on top' to 'Show me your 10 fingers', the very youngest children have a clear understanding of expectations. Alongside your well-developed behaviour policy, you are developing the growth mindset throughout the school, encouraging pupils to think hard about what they are learning and to learn from their mistakes. Pupils are therefore keen to learn, and ready to learn and to think hard about what they are learning, persevering when it is sometimes challenging.
- Teaching assistants are used very effectively throughout the school. By providing appropriate training to this large group of staff, you have ensured that children are well supported in their learning from the minute they enter the Reception classes. The school has an extremely high number of pupils who have often

complex learning needs. The staff you have employed to work with those pupils do a wonderful job of supporting them. As a result, this vulnerable group of pupils make good progress from their varying starting points. The work that you, your senior leaders and the special educational needs co-ordinator do with families and external professionals is considerable. This not only ensures that parents are well supported, about which they are effusive, but also that these pupils are completely 'at home' in the school.

- The proportion of pupils at the end of key stage 1 who achieved the expected standard in reading and writing in 2017 was above the national average. In mathematics, the proportion was in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who achieved greater depth in all three areas was above the national average. This, in school tracking and work in pupils' books, shows that the majority of pupils, including the most able, made good progress from their start in key stage 1. You agreed that there is still scope for teachers to plan more opportunities to write at length and to build writing stamina for pupils in Year 2, including those who are disadvantaged.
- The second area that I looked at was how teachers plan for all children in Reception to make the best progress they can from their starting points. A significant proportion of children continue to enter the school with skills and abilities that are lower than those typical of children of this age. Some speak English as an additional language and some have significant needs. Careful initial tracking of these children as they move through the Reception Year, alongside their learning journeys, shows that the vast majority of children make good progress from their starting points.
- You have already been working with the many pre-schools and nurseries that feed into the school. Parents appreciate the home-school visits that the early years leader does. These ensure that children settle quickly and come on in leaps and bounds, particularly in their communication, language and literacy, as the year progresses. The developed outdoor area provides a stimulating and exciting environment for the children to explore. They clearly love it. Opportunities for them to play independently and with others, and to practise early reading, writing and number, are many and varied. Children are already well settled in this large area, which is used by the three Reception classes. As a result, children from all classes happily mingle, play and talk together.
- The third area that I looked at was how well leaders and governors use additional funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make the best progress they can. This is because, over time, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attain the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 has been below the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieve the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has also been below the national average over time.
- Your team, including the attendance officer, family support worker, special educational needs co-ordinator and governors, works collaboratively to ensure that additional funding is spent wisely to support both families and pupils. Many initiatives have been introduced to, for example, encourage parents to support their children's learning, including reading and mathematics workshops. You have

also funded disadvantaged pupils who wish to attend the pre- and after-school provision which is on site but run privately. Despite your best efforts, not all parents take up this offer.

- Many of this group of pupils often face challenging home circumstances. Some have SEN and/or disabilities, and some have poor attendance or are regularly late for school. Despite this, in-school assessment information, work in pupils' books and teaching over time show that the majority of this group of pupils make good progress. You, your staff and governors accept, however, that it is necessary to accelerate these pupils' progress in order to diminish the difference with all other pupils nationally.
- Governors receive detailed and regular information from you showing the progress of disadvantaged pupils. The actions you take to reduce the barriers that sometimes prevent pupils from achieving as well as they can are evaluated well. You leave no stone unturned, often going over and above what might reasonably be expected to support families and pupils. You continue to address this important area of the school's work. It is highlighted again within the school development plans, which include routine monitoring and regular review.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers continue to challenge disadvantaged pupils to ensure that their progress is accelerated
- teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to write at length in Year 2 to build their writing stamina, resilience and perseverance
- every effort continues to be made to decrease the absence and persistent absence of the school's most vulnerable pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, governors and your office staff to discuss safeguarding and aspects of school leadership and management. Together with you, I observed learning in the majority of classes, talked with pupils about their learning and heard pupils read during lessons. Your

senior leaders and I scrutinised English and mathematics work from a random selection of disadvantaged and higher-attaining pupils from across the school. I spoke with you about safeguarding arrangements and records of attendance. We viewed information about child protection, records of referrals to social care and actions that followed. I also scrutinised the school's self-evaluation, development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. I took account of the 50 responses from parents to Parent View, 29 of which were by text.