

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



25 January 2018

Mrs Judith Driver
Headteacher
Balliol Primary School
Chesters Avenue
Longbenton
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE12 8QP

Dear Mrs Driver

Short inspection of Balliol Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 January 2018, 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.

Based on the evidence available during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.

Since you took up post in September 2017, you have begun to address weaknesses in the school that have, over time, prevented pupils from making enough progress to overcome the gaps in their knowledge and skills when they enter the school.

In the last inspection, leaders were asked to share the best practice of the most skilled teachers so that the quality of teaching overall improved and became more consistent. On this inspection, I found the quality of teaching still to be variable. There is some strong practice, but the most skilled teachers do not have enough time and opportunity to work with their colleagues. Your deputy headteacher has modelled some lessons for teachers in key stage 1 and you have plans to introduce a coaching programme, but this is yet to happen. Since your appointment, you have worked with the local authority to review the quality of teaching and you know where improvements need to be made. Some of the support you are providing for teachers has begun to have a positive effect. However, aspects of teaching in the early years and at key stage 1 need to be improved. For example, the quality of phonics teaching was allowed to decline last year because leaders did not check on pupils' progress closely enough. As a result, only six out of ten pupils in Year 1 attained the expected standard in the national phonics screening check and by the

end of Year 2, one in five pupils still fell short of the expectation. Although you are working to improve teachers' skills, the teaching of phonics still needs to improve.

During the inspection, I listened to some pupils read. I found younger pupils still relied on their knowledge of phonics to decode words and occasionally made errors with word suffixes. It was clear, however, that they enjoyed reading and that their progress was being regularly assessed. Pupils were provided with suitable books for their level of development.

In recent years, children have not always made rapid enough progress in the Nursery and Reception classes and teaching in key stage 1 has not been strong enough to accelerate pupils' progress. Consequently, outcomes at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have remained stubbornly below average. You have already begun to remodel the way teaching and learning are organised in the early years and, very recently, have begun to admit two-year-olds so that you can work with children from an earlier age.

In lessons, the large majority of pupils show positive attitudes and are keen to learn. Teachers have improved the way they develop pupils' reading skills across key stage 2 and approaches to the teaching of writing are now more sophisticated. These improvements are reflected in the stronger and more consistent progress pupils now make in writing. They are increasingly able to write at length and to add colour and variety to their choice of language. Too many pupils, however, continue to struggle with spelling, punctuation and grammar and some are uncertain about how to form and join letters, which slows their writing and adversely affects the quality of their presentation.

In the recent past, attendance was well below the national average and a relatively high proportion of pupils missed school regularly. Governors picked this up and challenged leaders to improve the situation. Leaders' concerted efforts last year successfully raised the importance of good attendance. The employment of a family support worker and a range of new incentives made a significant difference and attendance improved markedly. Last year, overall attendance was in line with that seen nationally and far fewer pupils were regularly absent. Pleasingly, attendance information for this year shows these improvements have been sustained, with disadvantaged pupils attending as well as other pupils.

Standards of behaviour in the school are generally good and I found the school to be calm and orderly. However, the pupils I spoke to told me there is occasional poor behaviour within lessons and at social times. Records show this is isolated to a small core of pupils, several of whom have been repeatedly excluded, and some pupils are now educated at an alternative provider. Last term you reviewed the school behaviour policy and set up the Lynx Room for pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour. I found this to be working well and noted staff who responded to Ofsted's survey during the inspection felt leaders provide good support in managing behaviour. Nevertheless, the use of fixed-term exclusions has continued this year to be well above the average for primary schools.

Safeguarding is effective.

Following your appointment, you have made thorough checks on the quality of safeguarding in the school. The governors have also recently completed an extensive audit of safeguarding arrangements. Together you have put in place a detailed plan to further develop practice. You are confident all members of staff are knowledgeable and know what actions to take if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare or safety. Written records of the actions you take are timely and thorough. They show you work effectively with families and external agencies as necessary and doggedly pursue a swift resolution of concerns.

Your records also show bullying incidents are rare. Pupils told me they think anti-bullying is promoted well in school and parents who responded to Parent View were confident bullying is managed effectively in the school.

Inspection findings

- Although still very early in your headship, you have quickly identified the most pressing areas for improvement and have formed an effective partnership with your deputy headteacher. Together you have the capacity to sustain improvements. You have begun to share leadership responsibilities more widely and, as a result, members of staff are feeling empowered and keen to follow your lead.
- Governors are ambitious for the school. They are determined the school will help pupils overcome the challenge of disadvantage. They provide effective challenge and scrutiny of leaders' work.
- You are using assessment information more rigorously to hold teachers to account. You have introduced a programme of review meetings to check pupils are on track to attain the targets set for them. Where they are not, you are sharpening up how additional help is provided and checking it has a positive effect. Teachers have been set clear objectives and their performance is being managed effectively.
- You recognise the importance of children making the best possible start, especially as most children enter the school with skills below those typical for their age. The remodelling of the early years unit and the introduction of provision for two-year-olds are positive developments. Staff are beginning to work as a more coordinated team. The indoor environment is stimulating for children and teachers are providing suitable activities to develop children's reading, writing and number skills. However, the outdoor space is not contributing to children's learning as much as it should.
- Many pupils make good progress across key stage 2. Most take pride in their work and are keen to develop their skills. Middle leaders are improving the core curriculum and ensuring that the most effective teaching strategies are being adopted by their less experienced colleagues. However, current assessment information shows many pupils are working below the standard expected for their age and need consistently high-quality teaching to catch up.

- The school is a caring and nurturing environment. The curriculum caters well for pupils' health and there are many opportunities within the curriculum that contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching in the early years improves and children have access to a broader range of learning opportunities
- the teaching of phonics improves and every effort is made to ensure that all pupils reach the expected standard in the national phonics screening check by the end of Year 2
- the quality of teaching across key stages 1 and 2 consistently promotes good progress in reading, writing and mathematics
- more is done to improve the behaviour and self-discipline of a small group of more-challenging pupils
- teachers maintain consistently high expectations for the quality of pupils' spelling, grammar and handwriting.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, the early years leader and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together we visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the impact of your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits, I checked some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' reading and writing work with the deputy headteacher in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I looked at the 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). I also considered the 19 responses to the staff survey. I looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, assessment records and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school, especially in reading and writing across key stages 1 and 2. In addition, I looked at the quality of early years provision and your work to improve behaviour and attendance across the school. I also looked at the work of

governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.