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6 February 2018

Mrs Rebecca Negrello
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Dear Mrs Negrello

Short inspection of Abbots Langley School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Since taking up post in September 2017, having previously been the school's deputy headteacher, you have been effectively supported by the governing body and local authority. Your commitment to the school and community has been demonstrated by the rigour with which you have quickly undertaken essential work surrounding assessment and monitoring in the school. You are relentless in your expectation that all pupils achieve well.

Abbots Langley is an inclusive school where children and pupils feel proud to be. I spoke to many pupils during my visit, especially those older pupils who have been at the school since Reception. All of these pupils feel they have had a very good start to their school experience, and appreciate the support they have received in getting ready to go to secondary school. Pupils also spoke highly of how they are cared for by staff in the school, and they feel safe and well looked after. For example, the school's pastoral support area, the Lodge, is a very popular space that pupils refer to as somewhere they can talk and know they are listened to. Pupils were overwhelmingly complimentary about the way that all adults are approachable and 'always make time for you'. These factors contribute towards pupils feeling confident, happy and ready to learn.

You have acted quickly on areas in which pupils did not achieve as well in 2017. You are using the expertise of your recently appointed leadership team well. Like you,

your leaders are relentless in their motivation and enthusiasm to secure better achievement for the pupils at Abbots Langley Primary School. You, your leaders and governors are aware of the aspects of pupils' achievement that remain a focus for you, most notably those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A significant minority of parents and carers on Parent View raised some concerns about the school's provision. In response, I spent a long time reviewing the school's safeguarding procedures, behaviour management procedures and records of incidents. I also considered how you and other leaders provide for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The evidence gathered during the inspection demonstrates that you are taking effective action in the areas reviewed. However, we did identify that your work with parents who have concerns is not yet as well established.

There has been a scrupulous focus on the areas to improve identified in the previous inspection. More recently, your work to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is ensuring that all pupils are making the progress they are capable of from their starting points. Additionally, you have successfully increased the leadership capacity of subject leaders who are now supporting you effectively and contributing well towards the whole-school improvement. Indeed, your work to support the professional development of staff and their well-being has created a positive learning ethos throughout the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

At Abbots Langley, there is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. On starting your headship, you reviewed and evaluated safeguarding and used analysis of this work to successfully further improve many of your safeguarding systems. This work has been invaluable in securing watertight processes that are used well by all staff to ensure that children and pupils are safe and they are well cared for. As well as your own scrutiny, recently, the local authority have carried out a thorough audit and confirmed the effectiveness of safeguarding throughout the school. This was verified by inspection evidence.

You make thorough checks to ensure that everyone who works in, or visits the school is suitable to work with children and pupils. You also provide regular training and updates for staff to keep them well informed about how to recognise the signs of abuse, neglect or possible extremism. The records you keep are meticulous. Evidence during the inspection confirms that actions and follow-up monitoring for safeguarding and behaviour are conscientiously checked, both by yourself and by the allocated safeguarding governor.

The wider curriculum includes aspects of teaching pupils to keep themselves safe, including how to deal with the risks pupils may face when using the internet. Pupils said that they are confident they can share any concerns or worries they may have with a member of staff, and that they know that issues will be swiftly sorted out. Pupils knowledgeably shared with me their understanding and application of 'helping hands at Abbots'. A pupil said, 'We are safe and know all adults look after

us.'

A small number of parents have raised concerns, and you have been very thorough in response to these. While many parents are positive about their children being well looked after, there remain some worries among a significant minority of parents, most notably about the management of behaviour. Although, generally, behaviour is positive, and you are constantly reviewing the systems and processes in place to support pupils with more challenging behaviour, you are also working hard to develop communication links that all parents find helpful. You have already identified the need to improve this further, so that parents' confidence in leaders' work is nurtured.

Inspection findings

- One line of enquiry during the inspection was to consider the quality of mathematics provision across the school. This came about because, in 2017, the proportion of key stage 2 pupils achieving the expected standard and the higher standards in mathematics was below the national average. Additionally, the progress key stage 2 pupils made from their key stage 1 starting points was also below the national average.
- Your precise assessment system is now allowing you to know where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding, and enables you to act quickly to resolve this. For example, the mathematics leader identified reasoning as a common weakness across the school and immediately set about rectifying this by training staff and undertaking monitoring to check the impact of her work. Consequently, more pupils are making better progress, and a higher proportion of pupils are on target to achieve well.
- During the inspection, I looked at how well pupils in key stage 1 are achieving following a slight decline in the number of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, and disappointing outcomes in pupils' writing attainment.
- The external moderation of the school results in 2017 indicated that there was not enough recorded evidence to confirm how well pupils were achieving in writing. You have acted on this specific issue quickly, and used it to guide the standards across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. In particular, you are using this evidence to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments. As a result of this renewed, more rigorous approach, a higher proportion of key stage 1 pupils are now making the progress they should.
- I wanted to explore how well disadvantaged pupils achieve and evaluate the use of the additional funding to ensure that it makes a positive difference to these pupils. A reason for this focus was that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have not been consistently strong over time.
- Your strategy for the use of additional funding is proving effective. You have pinpointed the specific requirements of each pupil and are ensuring that their needs on their 'pupil premium partnership plans' are fully met with individualised programmes of support. Pupils' access to events such as forest school activities, mindfulness club and play therapy is successfully providing tailor-made emotional

support that is increasing pupils' social awareness and confidence.

- The increased focus on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils' needs are met is having a profound impact on their academic achievement and, more so, their personal, social and emotional well-being. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' progress is stronger. However, you have identified on your school development plan that this work needs to be sustained in order for disadvantaged pupil outcomes to be consistently good over time.
- The final planned line of enquiry was to consider how well the most able pupils achieve across the school. The reason for this was that, in the 2017 outcomes, the number of pupils achieving greater depth at key stage 1 and those achieving the higher standard on leaving key stage 2 are below the national average. Ensuring that the most able pupils are challenged was also an area for improvement in the previous inspection.
- You have further refined the work you have been doing on presenting pupils with challenge in their learning. Pupils talked enthusiastically about exceeding the 'three challenges and going on to a fourth'. They also spoke about taking additional challenges home so they could see whether they could do it on their own 'and think of better ways of doing it'. Pupils now 'investigate', 'explain' and 'consider another way', and this is common practice to extend and deepen pupils' thinking. Pupils' books in a range of subjects and the school's monitoring show that a higher proportion of most-able pupils are now achieving greater depth in their work.
- A few parents during the inspection identified concerns about the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and its impact on the achievement of pupils who do not face the same challenges. In response to this, I spent additional time reviewing this provision.
- The school is tenacious in the importance it places on retaining inclusivity: that all pupils access a high-quality education, no matter what their challenges to learning. Thorough leadership in this area is ensuring that pupils' needs are well considered and met within the school's capacity to do so. Indeed, such is the commitment to providing the best for every pupil that leaders often 'go the extra mile', beyond the financial budget that they have allocated to ensure that pupils' needs are fully met. As one pupil explained, 'I used to not be able to do things and feel worried, but now I can.' When asked why this was the case, the pupil responded, 'Because teachers know I worry and so they get other people to keep an eye on me and give me extra time or things that will make it easier for me.'
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their varied starting points. Equally, despite some parental concerns, the inclusive nature of the school does not detract from the achievement of other pupils. Instead, it ensures that all pupils develop a greater understanding of the needs of others, and the importance of equality and empathy in society. This serves to create young people who are ready to be respectable young citizens in British society.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- carry out further work to develop positive parental relationships and effective communication, so that parents are confident in, and fully understand, the school's rationale behind its decisions
- continue to focus on improving disadvantaged pupils' progress so that these pupils consistently achieve well compared to their peers nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher, the assessment leader, other leaders and members of staff. I also met with the chair of governors, the vice-chair and safeguarding governor, as well as a representative from the local authority.
- Additionally, I scrutinised specific records of the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities alongside the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo).
- I spoke informally to pupils throughout the day and met with a group of pupils to talk to them about safety, behaviour and how they feel about their school experiences.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised to evaluate the capacity of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I also looked at a sample of pupils' current work including that of disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the most able pupils.
- The views of 118 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 108 responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the views of parents I spoke to during the inspection.
- I looked at the 25 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. There were no pupil responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Safeguarding documentation such as behaviour logs, concern forms and records of support for pupils were examined. This included looking at policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils, including checks made during the recruitment of new staff and referrals made to external agencies. I met with the learning mentor and family support worker to evaluate the impact of their work.