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20 March 2018

Mrs Sharon Farrell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Farrell

Short inspection of Faringdon Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2017 you have quickly built the trust, respect and support of staff, parents and carers. Prior to your arrival, there had been a period of instability and parents' confidence in the school and staff morale had waned. Your strong, resilient leadership and clear direction have quickly united the school community and you have won hearts and minds. You have managed the very significant challenges presented by the building issues. Other leaders and staff at the school now feel energised and relish the opportunity to play their role in the school's development. Staff and parents speak highly of your leadership, your calm, measured approach and way you nurture all members of the school. As one parent explained, 'The new headteacher is brilliant. She has been a breath of fresh air.'

The school is a happy community. Pupils behave well in class and around the school. They are polite and respectful and speak confidently to visitors, enthusiastically talking about their work. They describe their school as friendly and appreciate the way that their teachers support and help them to learn. Pupils enjoy learning a wide range of subjects and particularly like reading. They value the way that their teachers considered their views when reshaping the new curriculum. In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils attained the expected standards. Attainment was particularly high and well above average in grammar, punctuation and spelling, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils also attained highly and, in some subjects, they attained higher standards than other pupils. Current pupils, including disadvantaged pupils,

continue to make good progress.

Leaders have maintained the strengths from the previous inspection and effectively tackled the areas for improvement. Teaching is continuing to improve and there is some exemplary practice and inspirational teaching in the school. Disadvantaged pupils are suitably supported and attain as well as other pupils in writing. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning and help them to stay focused on their work. In 2017, the proportion of pupils that attained the higher standards in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was broadly average. However, we agreed that currently there are too few opportunities for all pupils to develop their reasoning skills and apply their skills by solving problems.

You have wisely prioritised the need to stabilise the school and develop leadership capacity and skills to help you drive further improvement. You, and other leaders, have already introduced many positive changes, including a new approach to reading and new assessment systems. You have also redesigned and invigorated the curriculum. However, you acknowledge that pupils' work in most subjects beyond English and mathematics does not yet reveal learning at depth. You, and other leaders, keep careful track of the results of pupils' assessments. However, you recognise that leaders have not carried out timely, regular reviews of pupils' work in books. As a result, some work of poor quality has not been picked up or addressed sufficiently by leaders. We also agreed that in a few classes, teachers do not have high enough expectations of the presentation and quality of pupils' written work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Children's well-being and care are at the heart of the school's work. Staff know pupils and their families very well and are alert to any changes in pupils' behaviour or demeanour. Leaders and other staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures. They take prompt action to ensure that pupils are kept safe and, when needed, refer concerns on swiftly to relevant agencies. Leaders work with a wide range of different outside organisations, including health professionals, to keep pupils safe. They have detailed, comprehensive records which help them to keep careful oversight of all safeguarding matters.

The dedicated leader for pastoral care is often the first point of contact for families and she makes a strong contribution to the support for pupils' well-being. Pupils value the way the pastoral leader and other staff are always available if they need to talk through any worries. Pupils feel safe in school. They say that bullying does occasionally happen and that there are sometimes friendship fallings-out and teasing. However, pupils say that their teachers always support them and resolve these issues quickly. Pupils are knowledgeable about keeping safe online and other aspects of safeguarding such as road safety and 'stranger danger'.

Governors and representatives from the trust visit the school regularly to check safeguarding procedures, including site safety. They have made sure that the current building issues have not compromised the safety of pupils, and that this area of the school is fenced off securely. The vast majority of parents agree that their children feel safe at school and staff are unanimous that pupils are safe at

Faringdon. While some parents expressed concern about the difficulties with the building, they recognise that leaders are managing this difficult situation most capably.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we agreed to focus on aspects of the school's work including: safeguarding and attendance; how well leaders are sustaining the improvements in pupils' attainment; the curriculum; and how effectively leaders are using the government's additional funding to make sure that disadvantaged pupils achieve well.
- Overall attendance is similar to the national average. In 2017, persistent absence was above average and had risen slightly from the previous year. You have taken the right steps to improve persistent absence. Awards are given to reward pupils' good attendance and you follow up any absence very promptly. The breakfast club has also contributed to pupils' improving attendance.
- You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and well-judged plans to make sure that pupils' good attainment is sustained. Subject and phase leaders are increasingly playing a role in school improvement. They work as a united team and share your vision. You are capitalising on the considerable skills and talents within the staff team, drawing upon their expertise.
- The school's well-considered new approach to reading is having a very positive impact on pupils' enjoyment of reading, their understanding of texts and the craft of writing. Improvements have also been made to pupils' spelling and written calculations in mathematics. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that pupils do not have enough opportunity to solve problems and develop their reasoning skills.
- Staff benefit from the support of the trust. This includes attending training and sharing expertise with colleagues. Leaders from the school and the trust carry out regular health-checks and monitor the outcomes of pupils' assessments. However, you are aware that currently there is insufficient monitoring of pupils' work in books.
- Since your appointment, you and other leaders have wasted no time in getting to grips with reshaping the curriculum. You have harnessed the interests, skills and enthusiasm of staff and taken into account pupils' views. The revised curriculum sets out clearly the learning objectives and topic themes for each year group and subject. As a result, the curriculum has been strengthened and enriched, and ensures that pupils' experiences build upon previous learning.
- Pupils now have more opportunities to learn through practical experiments in science, and links between subjects have made learning more meaningful. For example, pupils' strong learning about the Second World War has inspired their writing in English. During our visits to classes, we saw examples of high-quality and emotive writing reflecting pupils' good learning in history. One pupil wrote, 'As we arrived at the trenches, the copper stench of blood struck me like a fist to the face.' However, this high-quality work is not seen consistently across the school. In most subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils' work typically lacks depth as many tasks do not provide enough challenge.

- Leaders make very good use of the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. The attainment of this group of pupils is given priority in the school development plan and leaders keep careful oversight of pupils' progress. A wide range of extra support and high-quality care make a notable difference to pupils' attainment and well-being. Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress and achieving as well as other pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they strengthen their monitoring to include more timely, regular checks on the quality and presentation of pupils' work in books, in all subjects, so that any issues can be addressed promptly
- they embed the new curriculum and refine learning tasks so that pupils are challenged and can learn more deeply in all subjects
- pupils are given more opportunities in mathematics to solve problems and develop their reasoning skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of directors and the executive headteacher of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together, we visited classes in all year groups to observe pupils' learning, talk to them and look at their work in books. We met to discuss pupils' progress and the school's self-evaluation. I met with four other leaders including the acting deputy headteacher and took account of the 14 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. I held a meeting with two members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and two members of the academy trust. I met with a group of pupils from Years 3 to 6 and considered the views of pupils through the 36 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey. I reviewed a wide range of documents and school policies, including the school's pre-employment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and other safeguarding information. I considered the views of parents through the 39 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and parents' free-text comments, and talked with parents at the start of the school day.