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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs E Gater
Headteacher
Blurton Primary School
Poplar Drive
Blurton
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST3 3AZ

Dear Mrs Gater,

Short inspection of Blurton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Blurton Primary School is a lively community fully focused on its learning. The building is safe, well-maintained and enhanced by relevant and attractive wall displays. Pupils enjoy coming to school very much, and those I spoke with appreciated how well it had prepared them for secondary school. Pupils have good opportunities to take up additional responsibilities and to represent the opinions of the pupil body to school leaders. They benefit considerably from after-school clubs for a wide range of activities, including but not confined to sport. At the time of my visit, there was considerable excitement about the forthcoming Year 6 production of 'The Lion King'.

Since your permanent appointment to the post of headteacher, you have led the school with considerable energy and clarity of purpose. You have set high standards for pupils' behaviour and for the effectiveness of teaching. The school has the strong support of its pupils, its staff and the large majority of its parents and carers.

You, your colleagues and the governors have a thorough understanding of the local community, and how the school can broaden pupils' horizons. You have made sure that pupils learn about a good range of religions, cultures and traditions. Pupils who spoke to me understood the importance of respect for others, and disapproved of

any form of prejudice.

The school rightly believes in overcoming quickly the difficulties that several of its pupils face. For some, the barrier is restricted communication, and for others it is their lack of social and emotional well-being. Leaders' effective work with other agencies to support pupils and their families has achieved local recognition. Inspection evidence confirmed that pupils who join the school demonstrating poor attitudes to learning respond well to the clarity and consistency of the school's expectations. They make rapid strides in improving their behaviour, so that they can begin learning well.

During the inspection, it was clear that pastoral concern for pupils was not at the expense of academic challenge, and that you allow no excuses for underachievement. Leaders are ambitious, and in our discussions you identified without hesitation those aspects of the school which need more work. For example, you believe that a higher proportion of pupils in the early years can attain a good level of development. Both you and the governors demonstrate a willingness to seek out good practice and innovative approaches wherever they may be found. The school's plans are well judged, detailed and allow leaders and governors to check on progress easily.

Such a rigorous approach has enabled leaders to tackle effectively those areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The outdoor areas for children in the early years have been completely redesigned. These are now attractive, and staff design resources so that children develop their interest in all areas of learning. Leaders have ensured that pupils across the school take pride in their work. As a result, pupils' handwriting and presentation are generally of a high standard.

Leaders have also developed teachers' skills in setting appropriately challenging work for pupils of all abilities. In the lessons that we observed, we saw that this programme has been successful. Pupils concentrated hard, in part because their tasks were suitably demanding. Teaching assistants work well with individual pupils and groups of pupils. Teachers ask pupils probing questions which encourage them to think deeply, particularly in mathematics. They encourage pupils to be independent and resourceful, for example in using dictionaries, checklists or wall displays for help. Pupils collaborate well.

Standards in the school have improved and are rising further. Key stage 2 outcomes in 2017 were a marked improvement on those of 2016. Year 6 pupils had made progress in reading and in mathematics which was significantly greater than that seen nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a real strength of the school, and all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school has rigorous procedures for checking on pupils, for example if they are absent from school without good cause. Leaders have made sure that staff are thoroughly trained to identify any problems that pupils may face, and are alert to any signs that they may not be safe. The school's records show that when staff identify any risk to pupils, leaders work effectively with parents to

guarantee the pupils' well-being. The school's enhanced relationship with social services contributes significantly to the quality of its safeguarding work.

Pupils told me that they feel entirely safe in school. They said that bullying only happens rarely, and that they have every confidence that staff will resolve any difficulties promptly. Pupils were able to recall, in good detail, the advice that staff had given them about how to stay safe online, and about road safety.

Inspection findings

- In training teachers to set work that is well matched to the abilities of all the pupils in each class, you have emphasised the need to stretch the most able. We saw in lessons and in pupils' workbooks that their work is of an appropriately high standard, and is sometimes impressive. In mathematics, teachers have established that there are always different approaches, and that there are a range of different answers to some questions. Pupils are therefore encouraged to keep thinking, and not settle for their first response. Teachers expect most-able pupils to gain a detailed knowledge of topics in the wider curriculum, and to use the technical terms associated with each subject correctly. The school's information shows that the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in a range of subjects is rising.
- In recent years, the achievement of boys has lagged behind that of girls. In 2017, when the achievement of all Year 6 pupils improved, noticeable gaps in both attainment and progress between boys and girls remained. You attribute the difference to some boys' attitudes when they join the school, and the impact that these attitudes have on their learning. However, information supplied by the school's leaders showed me that for current pupils the difference in progress has been largely eliminated. During the inspection, the attitudes of boys to their work were as strong as those of the girls. There remains a little catching up to do, especially if all boys with the capacity to do so are to fulfil their potential at the higher standard in key stage 2.
- The school's curriculum encompasses all the required subjects, and often combines them in interesting ways. For example, pupils told me how fascinating it had been to learn about Mayan mathematics when studying the history of the Mayan people. Teachers plan some excellent opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects, for example by drawing graphs or writing in a specified style. Many pieces of work showed that pupils had made strong gains in their knowledge and understanding of particular foundation subjects.
- However, scrutiny of work showed me that pupils in some year groups have not made the consistent and substantial progress in foundation subjects to which the school aspires. For example, although some pupils showed a strong understanding of how to work scientifically, for others the evidence was thin. This academic year, leaders have trialled a means of recording pupils' attainment in foundation subjects to ensure that those who teach the class in subsequent years know pupils' starting points. We agreed that this initiative provides a secure basis for further work to track and augment pupils' progress.

- Pupils' attendance in the current academic year is below the national average for 2016/17, and at present shows little sign of improvement. Pupils leaving and joining the school, other than at normal points of transition, add to the school's difficulties. The attendance of boys is below that of girls. Leaders and governors are well aware of the importance of raising attendance, and it features prominently in their plans. Staff tackle persistent absence rigorously and creatively, and can point to success in their work with particular families. Pupils told me how rewards and assemblies reinforce the importance of good attendance. However, a small but stubborn proportion of parents remain reluctant to send their children to school at every opportunity.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they investigate best practice to discover how the school can work more effectively with the families of pupils who are persistently absent
- teachers make good use of the school's new assessment tool in foundation subjects to plan work which enables pupils to make substantial progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Spoor
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, governors and a representative of the local authority. I held informal discussions with other members of staff. I observed pupils learning in several classes jointly with you. I met with a group of pupils drawn from Years 4 and 6 to gather their views, and spoke informally with several more. I met with parents at the start of the school day. I observed pupils' behaviour at social times and when they moved around the school.

I took account of the 46 recent responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and comments made using the free-text facility. I also considered 49 responses to the survey for staff, and 89 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

I scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the evaluation of the school's performance and plans for improvement; records of governors' meetings; policies; curriculum plans; records showing how leaders monitor the effectiveness of teaching; and records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I looked in detail at records which show how the school keeps pupils safe.