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12 July 2018

Mrs Rachel Lane
Executive Headteacher
Finlay Community School
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Dear Mrs Lane

Short inspection of Finlay Community School

Following my visit to the school on 21 June 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 November 2014.

The school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education at the school since the last inspection. You have created a well-trained and effective staff team and together you have made good improvements to the quality of education and the personal development and welfare of pupils.

You took over as executive headteacher of the school around three years ago and appointed your new leadership team. Together, you have made a range of changes to improve the quality of the teaching, curriculum and provision at the school. This was necessary to ensure that pupils benefited fully from all of the opportunities available to them. For example, you have improved the amount and quality of writing that pupils produce in a wide range of subjects. This was one of the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. These changes have been embraced by staff and are being carried out successfully. As a result, pupils' personal development, welfare and learning have improved.

Parents and carers are happy with the education provided by the school and comment favourably about how responsive teachers and leaders are to any questions or concerns they may have. As one said, 'There is always someone to talk to.' The pupils are thoughtful and curious. They are keen to do well and benefit from a wide range of experiences.

Governors work hard to ensure that the school is successful and have made strategic decisions to drive forward improvements at the school. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have ensured

that the school budget is used successfully to improve the education that pupils receive.

Safeguarding is effective

You and your leadership team are absolutely committed to the safety and welfare of pupils. Together with the governors, you have strengthened arrangements to safeguard pupils and employed additional staff to support the welfare of children. You and your senior team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. The arrangements for checking the suitability of staff to work with children meet requirements.

All staff have had recent and relevant training about how to keep children safe. School leaders ensure that this training is refreshed regularly and all new staff receive this prior to starting work. Governors' training is also up to date.

Children are taught how to keep safe through a range of lessons, assemblies and school trips. They are taught about online safety, fire and road safety, and a variety of other aspects of staying safe. They are confident that they have someone they could tell if they had any concerns. As a result of this, and the calm, ordered environment in the school, children feel safe. Parents and governors are confident that they are justified in this.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry was to examine how you are ensuring that all children have the best possible start to school so that they learn well. In the past, outcomes at the end of the Reception Year have been low. Improvements were made last year. However, they were still not as strong as they could be.
- To address this, the early years team has made effective changes to the way that it plans learning. This enables members of staff to identify and address gaps in children's understanding. They have introduced a more practical approach in mathematics. This is helping the children to understand better and to develop a wider mathematical vocabulary.
- You have employed additional staff to work with pupils who may be experiencing difficulties. There is a particular focus on supporting the pastoral needs of younger children. Teachers have also changed the way that they communicate with teaching assistants to ensure that all staff have a precise understanding of what to do to support each pupil effectively.
- Teaching staff in Reception are improving the way that they communicate with parents so that parents can be more involved in their children's learning. For example, parents contribute to an electronic system for recording progress which is shared between home and school.
- As a result of all these actions, children are making much better progress in the Reception class from their individual starting points.
- The second line of enquiry was to explore how well you and your leaders are

improving the progress of all pupils in key stage 2, especially for the most able. In the past, progress has been slow.

- In particular, we considered the actions you and your teachers have taken to improve pupils' ability to write at length and spell correctly. The new approach you and your staff have taken is helping the pupils to learn to spell better. You have also changed the way that writing is taught, ensuring that pupils are given many more opportunities to practise their writing skills. This has raised the expectations of the amount and quality of writing that pupils can produce.
- Evidence from pupils' current workbooks, coupled with standardised assessments and end-of-key-stage national tests, demonstrates that progress is much stronger now in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the new approaches to spelling and writing are not used effectively in all subjects. This means that pupils do not become sufficiently able to spell and understand subject-specific vocabulary in wider curriculum areas.
- The final line of enquiry examined how well leaders were improving pupils' behaviour. Teachers ensure that classrooms are provided with displays and learning resources that build pupils' independence. Following training, teachers now plan work that is more precisely linked to pupils' abilities. This has been successfully rectified since the previous inspection, when it was highlighted as an area for the school to develop. Together, these approaches have ensured that pupils, including the most able, are fully focused on their learning and display positive attitudes to learning.
- In the past, the proportion of pupils excluded was higher than levels seen typically, nationally. When you started at the school you worked with senior leaders to change the way that adults tackled poor behaviour. You introduced a simple approach that combined clear consequences for poor behaviour with rewards for good behaviour. This approach has been followed consistently by staff. As a result, pupils understand exactly what will happen if they do not behave well.
- At the same time as you changed the behaviour system, you employed additional staff to work with pupils who were experiencing emotional difficulties in order to help them to be ready to learn. Together, the new system and the additional support have meant that pupils' behaviour has improved and the number of pupils receiving sanctions for poor behaviour has fallen quickly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new approach to improving spelling and writing is implemented across all aspects of the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Tom Morrison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with parents, pupils, staff, and governors and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Together with your leadership team, we observed learning across the school and looked at pupils' work to see the changes that had been made to teaching and learning. I examined a variety of documents including leaders' evaluation of the performance of the school, development plans, assessment information and the school's website. I also examined records of the checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children. I took account of the views of the parents from the 29 responses to the Ofsted online survey and in discussion with some parents before school.