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11 July 2018

Mr Richard Benson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Benson

Short inspection of Leedon Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 July 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered 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 the previous inspection, the school has expanded from a two- to a three-form entry school. There are three classes in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. Currently, there are two classes in Years 3 and 4, and these year groups will expand to three classes over the next two years. The Little Learners pre-school has also become part of the school. The pre-school admits both two- and three-year-olds.

This period of expansion has presented leaders with significant challenges. There has been some staff turnover, as new teachers have joined the school, and there has also been building work to accommodate the extra pupils. This has resulted in some distractions that have slowed the pace of school improvement: for example, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have not been as rigorous as they had been previously. However, you and your leaders, including governors, are back on track and able to identify what needs to be done to improve rapidly.

Since the previous inspection, local authority support has been 'light touch' due to Leedon Lower being previously judged a good school. However, the local authority has not carried out rigorous checks of how well the school is sustaining its work and has not supported the school through the transition period of growth. This has contributed towards the school's slower pace of improvement.

The school is a happy place, where pupils and parents and carers report a high degree of satisfaction. The wide range of activities planned in the curriculum, including visits, outdoor learning and overarching topics such as the current World Cup, engage and motivate pupils. Spanish is taught to all pupils from Reception onwards by a native Spanish teacher. All staff are proud to be members of the school. Responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire from teachers and support staff to questions about the work of the school and its pupils were overwhelmingly positive.

Parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and free-text responses were equally positive, with much value placed on the relationships and development of the whole child at the school. One parent reflected the views of many when she stated, 'Leedon is a caring school that makes every single child feel valued.'

Areas for improvement identified from the previous inspection have been tackled. These included providing a wider variety of writing opportunities for pupils and more sharing of good practice between teachers. School leaders have introduced a wealth of different strategies to get pupils writing more. Pupils engage with and enjoy these new approaches. Teachers have had informal opportunities to visit each other's classrooms. You have identified that more targeted visits would sharpen practice even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils report that they feel safe at school. They show good awareness of online safety measures and know what to do if they have a concern. They say that they are not aware of any bullying, and understand the difference between this and 'falling out'. Although there is some occasional inappropriate behaviour, pupils report that adults quickly sort this out. Parents feel that their children are kept safe at school. Case studies, shared by those responsible for safeguarding, demonstrate tenacious and effective follow-up with outside agencies when appropriate.

While the culture of safeguarding is appropriate, the record-keeping systems that underpin this are not wholly well organised. The single central record of checks undertaken on adults working in the school contained omissions that were rectified during the inspection. Staff have, however, received training on completing the single central record, and a safeguarding audit was carried out in October 2017.

You identified that your record-keeping could be improved. Following a review, school records about logged concerns and individual cases are currently being transferred from a paper to an electronic system. The new online safeguarding system is robust and helpful but does not yet include all of the historical information. School leaders, including governors, are committed to addressing these administrative issues urgently, supported by the local authority.

You and your leaders know pupils well and work hard to ensure their safety. Furthermore, this is reflected in pupil and staff survey results.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry during the inspection was about the attendance of pupils. This is because published information shows that, in 2016, pupils' attendance was lower than that of other schools nationally, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. More pupils were regularly absent than the national average, particularly vulnerable pupils. This has had a negative impact upon the achievement of these pupils.
- School information shows that attendance improved in 2017. The most recent figures indicate, however, that the improvements from 2017 have not been sustained. This is despite a concerted effort on the part of school leaders to ensure the good attendance of pupils. For example, a minibus is used to collect absentees or latecomers, fines have been issued to parents and a number of in-house rewards recognise good attendance. Persistent absence remains high, and leaders continue to tackle this with, for example, places offered at breakfast club.
- My second line of enquiry was about the effectiveness of the governing body in providing you and your leaders with support and holding you to account. I was also interested in how effectively governors were carrying out their duties. This was because the governing body has very recently undertaken a review of governance and the school's website contained some omissions.
- Governors acknowledge that the level of challenge they have historically provided to school leaders has not been sufficient. They also recognise shortcomings in their duties with regard to reporting information on the school's website. They now have action plans in place and are undertaking further training to address these areas. Governors have already reassigned roles and set up relevant committees to support their work.
- My third line of enquiry was about how well school leaders are using pupils' starting points in early years and key stage 1 to ensure that pupils make strong progress. This was because school outcomes have been variable, particularly for vulnerable pupils. Results have not always been in line with national averages and, over time, attainment at greater depth has been low.
- School leaders use assessments of children on entry to Reception to form a starting point from which to plan. These assessments have been checked through a moderation process with other schools. Reception children start at Leedon Lower with starting points typically below children of the same age nationally. Provision in the early years is carefully planned to meet children's needs. The proportion of children moving into Year 1 achieving a good level of development was close to the national average in 2017. Current school information indicates that this is likely to continue in 2018.
- In key stage 1, pupils make strong progress in phonics. This builds on the strong teaching, learning and assessment in the early years. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was close to the national average in 2017.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics, however, are variable. This was reflected in work seen during the inspection,

which indicated too much variation between classes and groups in terms of quality, expectations and progress over time. Basic skills are not rigorously reinforced and expectations of presentation and handwriting are too low for a significant minority of pupils. Some strong practice does exist and some gains in attainment have been made, but this is not consistent.

- My final line of enquiry was regarding the older pupils in key stage 2 and how well they are prepared for the next stages of their education. This is because there is no published data for pupils leaving your school at the end of Year 4.
- Pupils in Years 3 and 4 experience a wide range of curricular activities with a clear focus on English and mathematics. Spanish is also taught and the wider curriculum is delivered through engaging topics. School information, including work in books, demonstrates progress over time for most pupils. While presentation and expectations are variable here too, the majority of pupils are achieving well.
- Groups of vulnerable pupils receive a variety of interventions and additional activities planned to enable them to diminish any differences between them and their peers. While these are enjoyed by the pupils and some impact can be demonstrated, the inclusion team is not sufficiently focused on the impact the interventions and activities have on pupils' outcomes.
- Most-able pupils in Year 4 are provided for well in mathematics, where they work together on extra levels of challenge and formulate reasoning problems for each other. This is encouraging independence and providing opportunities for pupils to use and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding. These types of activity prepare them well for their next stage of education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leadership documentation is reorganised swiftly so that it is more easily accessible and can be monitored rigorously
- governors act on their review action plan quickly so that school leaders are held to account and challenged, particularly about school outcomes
- expectations of work in books are raised so that evidence of good progress is easy to identify and basic skills are taught well in all classes
- leaders and governors focus their monitoring and evaluation activities on raising and sustaining better outcomes for all groups of pupils, including the most able
- they continue to work on raising levels of attendance and reducing persistent absence, particularly for vulnerable pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Bell-Cook
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out learning walks in all classes, including early years and the pre-school. I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' books and learning journals in all classes. I held discussions with you, senior leaders and the governing body, including the chair. I also held discussions with staff, including middle leaders and support staff. I held a telephone call with the school's improvement partner from the local authority. I held discussions with pupils at lunchtime and during lessons. I considered 60 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire, 28 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 103 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, as well as 101 free-text responses from parents. I met with a number of parents at the school gate. I listened to pupils from Year 1 and Year 4 read. I undertook a scrutiny of a range of the school's documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, self-evaluation and school improvement and monitoring logs.