

18 October 2018

Mrs Jeanette Ashwin
Executive Headteacher
Langley School
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Sutton Coldfield
West Midlands
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Dear Mrs Ashwin

Short inspection of Langley School

Following my visit to the school on 2 October 2018 with Paul Elliott, Ofsted Inspector, 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 outstanding in November 2013.

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 outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

You took up post as executive headteacher of Langley School at the start of September 2018. Since this time, you have worked alongside the head of school to quickly find out about the school's strengths and aspects that need development. Your initial views about the school's weaknesses are accurate, and you have already set about introducing changes to address some of the identified shortcomings. You recognise that the needs of the most able pupils are not being fully met. In addition, the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is not consistently targeted well to overcome barriers to learning. We also agreed that information staff collect about pupils' behaviour is not used as effectively as it could be to reduce incidents of poor behaviour.

Despite these weaknesses, the school still has many strengths. Teachers work hard to ensure that pupils' learning experiences are purposeful and engaging. Many pupils, and especially those with some of the most significant special educational needs, make good progress over time because teachers design appropriate, bespoke learning programmes for individual pupils. Classrooms are warm, inviting places where pupils are usually very eager to participate in the full range of activities on offer. Staff are nurturing; they gently encourage and persuade pupils to do things for themselves, skilfully building their independence and self-confidence, enabling pupils to enjoy their learning.

Teachers work closely in partnership with other support staff to provide the necessary personal support to help pupils achieve well. Leaders ensure that the school's agreed approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are shared explicitly with staff through training and development opportunities. This has brought about a consistency of approach across the school, and a common understanding about effective practice. In the classroom, well-established routines, and staff who frequently celebrate positive behaviour, help to keep most pupils focused on the task in hand. This enables pupils to feel safe and secure, and willing to try out new experiences.

You are currently revising the school's development plan to ensure that the most important priorities for improvement are identified and addressed. The school draws on the expertise of other leaders, both from within school and from Beaufort – the other special school in the federation – which adds greater capacity to leadership. For example, leaders from Beaufort work with Langley leaders to review aspects of the school's work. This is contributing to improving teaching and learning, and is helping to raise teachers' expectations.

Parents and carers value the school's work and the feedback that they receive about their children's learning. This is evident in the home-school communication books, which reflect the trusting relationships that exist between parents and staff. Parents typically commented about the supportive nature of the school and the helpful advice staff provide to parents about their child's learning and development.

The governing body is knowledgeable about its main functions and responsibilities because governors attend relevant training. In addition, new governors undertake a period of induction, so they are clear about their role. Governors spend time in school to gain an insight into how the school operates. They ask leaders relevant questions to evaluate some of the decisions made. However, sometimes governors are not provided with sufficient information about pupils' achievement in order to challenge leaders fully, for example in relation to the pupil premium funding. Governors carry out their statutory responsibilities with regard to safeguarding robustly.

Leaders and governors described the 'fresh pair of eyes' that you have brought to the school's future strategic direction and thinking. Your initial plans for improvement were clearly articulated through our discussions. You are under no illusion about the challenges of the task ahead to ensure that the school quickly gets back on track and offers all pupils the best standard of education possible. Encouragingly, the wider leadership team and governing body are already very receptive to refining and making changes to practice in the best interests of the pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding pupils permeates all aspects of the school's work. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. An ongoing training programme means that staff and governors receive regular updates about a wide range of safeguarding matters – this is often tailored to feedback from staff about areas where they feel less confident. Staff are clear about reporting

procedures and make detailed records of any concerns, sharing these with statutory agencies when necessary. Leaders are persistent in pursuing agencies when their response is slow or perceived not to be in the best interests of the child. Leaders adopt appropriate safer recruitment practices to satisfy themselves that new staff are suitable to work with children.

Staff are aware of the greater safeguarding risks associated with pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and mitigate these risks through pupils' curriculum experiences. For example, those pupils who have very limited verbal communication are supported to share any worries through signing. Leaders also consider carefully the school's context when planning learning to help keep pupils safe. For example, pupils are taught about water safety due to the higher risk of drowning in Birmingham's canal system.

Inspection findings

- With the exception of the most able pupils, the majority of pupils achieve well over time from their low starting points as a result of effective teaching. Disadvantaged pupils attain similarly to other pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils compared to that of other pupils is marginally lower. Overall school attendance is lower than that of all schools nationally, although improving year-on-year. However, pupils' attendance is higher than average when compared with other special schools.
- While disadvantaged pupils do indeed generally benefit from the pupil premium funding, notably in relation to their social development, the school's pupil premium strategy is not as focused as it could be. This is because leaders have not routinely identified the specific barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. This means that identified strategies are more akin to a 'catch-all' approach, rather than specifically targeted to the needs of individuals.
- Leaders and governors do not check with enough rigour on the provision for disadvantaged pupils to be sure that it is making a positive difference to their achievement. The school's website does not include all of the mandatory information in relation to the pupil premium funding. For example, there is no evaluation of the use of pupil premium funding for the 2017/2018 period, nor are specific barriers to learning identified.
- Leaders have designed an appropriate curriculum that is adapted to meet the individual needs of most pupils, taking into account the objectives set out in education, health and care (EHC) plans. Staff have contributed to the vision for the 'Langley child' and identified key attributes of pupils and desired outcomes as the rationale for the curriculum. Teachers think creatively about different ways to engage pupils and do so successfully, despite some of the pupils' significant needs. However, we agreed that the needs of the most able pupils are not being met consistently well. Some teachers' expectations are not high enough for this group of pupils. This results in the most able pupils being set work which is too easy and slows their progress.
- Leaders make the development of pupils' independence and communication skills central to their mission. They are successful in their endeavours. Staff work

continually to improve pupils' communication skills, ensuring that they have the right tools to communicate effectively. As a result of whole-staff training, there is a consistent approach to communication across the curriculum. Even those pupils with very limited verbal communication skills are expected to try their best, using visual aids or signing, to express themselves clearly. For example, during a fun session which focused on the sounds and movements of animals, pupils used symbol cards to demonstrate their understanding that they were working collaboratively.

- Typically, most pupils behave well at school, follow teachers' instructions and stay engaged with the task in hand. On occasion, and often due to SEN and/or disability, the behaviour of a few pupils can be particularly problematic. Staff log these more serious behaviour episodes, such as bullying incidents. However, you have identified that this information is not used well to identify patterns and put in place strategies to reduce incidents. You have just begun to address this matter.
- Leaders make best use of partnership opportunities within the federation, drawing on expertise and using this to develop the skills of staff across the federation. In some instances, leaders have capitalised on experienced staff to coach teachers and help them develop their teaching skills. This has been especially successful with regard to developing staff's knowledge about speech, language and communication. Links with another primary school, co-located in the same building, are developing but are still at a relatively early stage. Work has mainly focused on enhancing pupils' social development. This includes the beneficial forest schools venture where pupils have learned about the environment at the same time as successfully building their confidence and self-esteem.
- Despite Langley being part of The Four Oaks Learning Trust for Excellence, formed in May 2013, a strong, reciprocal partnership has yet to be formed. However, very recently, there has been some initial thinking about how the schools in the trust can work more closely to improve provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This work is not yet having a demonstrable impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning, or outcomes for pupils in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers raise their expectations and set work for the most able pupils that is carefully matched to their needs and offers an appropriate level of challenge
- leaders sharpen the school's pupil premium strategy so that specific barriers to learning are routinely identified and addressed, and the use of funding is more carefully evaluated to maximise outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
- all the required information related to the use of pupil premium is included on the school's website
- information about the frequency and type of behaviour incidents is used more effectively to put in place strategies to improve pupils' behaviour.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We held meetings with you and the head of school to discuss the school's current evaluation and school improvement initiatives. We also met with other school leaders to discuss their impact on the school's work relating to teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors met with the head of school to discuss safeguarding arrangements and talked to several staff about safeguarding protocols. There was a discussion with the school bursar to discuss safer recruitment and scrutinise the school's single central record. Inspectors examined a range of documents, including the school's current self-evaluation and development plan, safeguarding information, governors' documentation and school policies. Inspectors observed learning in almost all classes, looked at a range of pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their school experience. An inspector spoke to the school's improvement adviser.

There were no results from the pupil survey and insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to make an evaluation. Five free-text comments from parents were taken into account. An inspector spoke to parents and escorts at the start of the school day. There were 25 responses to the staff survey.