

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 October 2018

Mr Peter Mandelstam
Headteacher
Alder Coppice Primary School
Northway
Sedgley
Dudley
West Midlands
DY3 3PS

Dear Mr Mandelstam

Short inspection of Alder Coppice Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 October 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 April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and other leaders are passionate about the school and ambitious for pupils to do well. You are all reflective and open to advice because you value opportunities to improve what you do for the benefit of pupils.

Where leaders spot a problem, they act to rectify it. For example, you identified that pupils' spelling was weak. Leaders conducted a root-and-branch review of how pupils' spelling knowledge is developed from when they start school through to the end of Year 6. This led you to change the approach to teaching phonics in the early years and key stage 1. As a result, pupils now gain a strong grasp of letters and the sounds they make. They are more confident in using phonics to help them spell words correctly. Similarly, you have changed the way older pupils build on this early knowledge and learn to spell more complicated words. Pupils' spelling has improved notably as a result.

In the same way, leaders have successfully tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. As a result, the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is effective. These pupils now make strong progress thanks to the support they receive.

Pupils are challenged more across a wider range of subjects than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. This is because leaders now insist that teachers include questions in all subjects that make pupils think deeply and explain their

understanding. However, leaders went beyond this when tackling the area for improvement. They used the inspection report as the catalyst to systematically review the content of each subject. As a result, leaders are in the process of considering, subject by subject, what they want pupils to learn in order to build a deep, memorable body of knowledge.

Leaders now use information about pupils' behaviour to target actions and resources as needed to support pupils in different classes. Leaders also look for indicators that behaviour may be linked to wider issues, such as pupils' attainment.

Leaders involved pupils in discussion about how teachers could better support them in knowing how to improve their work. Pupils' books show the positive impact of this. Pupils now find it easier to rework their writing and to show their working in mathematics. This helps teachers to give guidance along the way, which leads to clear improvement.

Leaders check teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment closely. They use this information to set their expectations for what pupils should achieve by the end of each year. Leaders check, along the way, if pupils are on track to reach the expected standards set by this process. This checking of progress has helped leaders to spot and address issues with high prior attainers. Some were not making the progress they should and so were not attaining well enough. Leaders now ensure that teachers challenge these pupils more effectively. As a result, their attainment has risen.

However, leaders have not reacted quickly enough to the decline in progress for some previously middle-attaining pupils. National test results for the last three years, and the school's own internal data, show that a sizeable group of middle prior attainers have not sustained the standards of which they are capable. Their attainment, in relation to their ages, has dropped year-on-year as they have moved through key stage 2. Leaders are aware that the issue exists, but their improvement plans are not focused sharply enough on addressing it. Consequently, it has not been tackled as effectively as has been the case with other areas that need attention.

Governors are committed to overseeing a good quality of education. They are knowledgeable about how to hold leaders to account and not afraid to do so. They are able to understand and challenge information that is provided to them. Once an issue is brought to their attention, governors seek to resolve it quickly and effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

A commitment to keeping pupils safe permeates the culture of the school. Staff act instantly if they have a concern and ensure that it is dealt with rigorously. Pupils feel safe and well cared for because they are. All can name several adults to whom they could turn for help if needed. A group of pupils known as the 'Keeping Safe Guardians' play a big part in this. These pupils support their peers through

challenges such as when they fall out with one another. They promote safe practices. For example, they have recently led an assembly in which they reminded their peers about how to stay safe and feel happy in school.

To ensure that safeguarding arrangements fulfil the school's desire to protect pupils, leaders have ensured that policies and processes are kept under review. As a result, they are fit for purpose and support staff to carry out their responsibilities well.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the care and support their children receive. They appreciate the vigilance of staff and the fact that they are always available to discuss any concerns about their children. They say that their children love coming to school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have refined their approach to checking the progress pupils make as they move from class to class. The system now makes it very clear which pupils are falling behind from their previous standards of attainment. As a result, leaders now spot more quickly those pupils who may be underachieving.
- In the past, the system used was less sophisticated. That is why leaders have only recently identified that progress has stalled for some middle prior attainers. Consequently, leaders had not prioritised the issue. This is why these pupils are not working at the standards they should be.
- Leaders are now acting to help these pupils catch up. However, their actions are having limited impact. This is because leaders are trying to develop many other aspects of the school's work at the same time as rectifying this weakness. Their improvement plans are not sufficiently focused on addressing this priority issue. As a result, leaders' actions have not made enough difference to these pupils' progress.
- Leaders use the pupil premium effectively to support the progress of lower-attaining disadvantaged pupils and to ensure that higher-attaining ones are well challenged. Nevertheless, disadvantaged pupils with middle prior attainment do not benefit as much from the pupil premium. This is because leaders have not, until recently, been sufficiently aware that some were not making enough progress. Consequently, the funding was not used to best effect in overcoming these pupils' barriers to learning.
- Subject leaders are systematically revising and rebuilding the curriculum to reflect senior leaders' vision to create mastery for pupils in all subjects. Pupils' books show that they are challenged to think deeply in a wide range of subjects. As a result, they make good progress.
- The curriculum continues to improve because, each year, leaders focus the school's efforts on improving the content of new subjects. As a result, the curriculum provides an increasingly rich body of knowledge for pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school improvement actions are focused sharply on making sure that middle prior attainers sustain the standards of which they are capable as they move through key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other school staff, the chair of the governing body, the school's improvement partner and two groups of pupils. I visited classrooms to look at pupils' learning, talk to them and examine the work in their books. I spoke to parents at the end of the school day and considered the 59 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey along with information sent in writing to me. I examined a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing; their plans for improvement; records relating to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and documents relating to safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.