

8 November 2018

Mrs Helen Murphy
Headteacher
Walmley Infant School
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Walmley
Sutton Coldfield
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Dear Mrs Murphy

Short inspection of Walmley Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The good outcomes for pupils identified at the last inspection have been built upon and further improved. Many more pupils are now reaching greater depth. This is a result of your increased expectations and strong drive for improvement since you became headteacher in April 2014. You and your deputy work closely together to ensure that children get a good start to their education and are well prepared for their move to junior school.

Since the last inspection, a new leadership team has been appointed. Following your appointment, a new deputy headteacher started in September 2015. An inclusion leader, previously the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), joined the leadership team in the autumn term 2015. In September 2018, a leader for assessment was appointed. There have also been changes in the teaching staff over time. A new chair of governors was appointed in September 2018; he had been the vice-chair in the previous academic year.

Steady and determined work has improved the school further. Leaders have challenged underperformance and made clear the high standards expected. They support staff and provide opportunities for them to develop their skills and knowledge. The hard work has created a united staff team. This was particularly evident during the inspection. Staff have taken on additional responsibilities. They provide effective support to your deputy while she is acting headteacher. This is

continuing to strengthen leadership at all levels, although there is still more to be done to fully develop the role of middle leaders. Staff speak positively about the changes. There is a strong commitment to a shared vision.

Effective training for staff has improved the quality of teaching and raised expectations. For example, in mathematics, staff develop their own understanding of mastery in order to improve their approach with pupils. They provide opportunities for pupils to reason and explain what they are doing. Consequently, outcomes in mathematics have risen over the last three years. You work effectively with other local schools to share best practice in assessing and moderating pupils' work. Teachers use this information to plan interesting and appropriate activities for pupils. Although expectations have been raised, leaders know more can be expected, especially from the very youngest children, if more pupils are to reach the high standards of which they are capable.

Governors know the school well. They use their wealth of skills and experience to challenge and support leaders in equal measure. They visit the school regularly to check for themselves the impact of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes for pupils. They talk to staff, examine pupils' work and evaluate school systems. As a result, governors are clear about the strengths of the school and know which areas need further development. Governors are rightly proud of the school.

Pupils of all ages behave very well. They are welcoming and keen to include everyone. They cooperate and support each other well in lessons and at breaktimes. The vast majority of pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning. They concentrate hard and try and try again. There are times when the lack of challenge results in some pupils becoming fidgety and losing concentration, but these are rare.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Over 100 responses were made to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and more than 80 positive text messages were received. Of those parents completing the questionnaire, 100% would recommend the school. Many parents spoke about the 'incredibly inclusive nature of the school' and the confidence they have in leaders who know each and every child as an individual. One parent summed up the views of many, stating, 'At Walmley Infant School it is the whole child that matters.'

Effective action has been taken to address the issues identified at the last inspection, although leaders recognise that this work is ongoing. Teachers now consider the needs of the most able pupils. Teachers adapt their questions to ensure that there is appropriate challenge for this group of pupils. Appropriate targets are set and shared with pupils, and their progress is checked by the inclusion leader. As a result of raised expectations, the most able pupils make strong progress. During the inspection, pupils of all ages were observed working independently. Appropriate resources help them work by themselves or in small groups without adult help. Pupils are confident and willing to have a go at a task by themselves. There are still occasions when adults limit what pupils can do. This prevents pupils from being as independent as they might. There is further work to

do to ensure that pupils, including the very youngest children, develop into capable, independent individuals.

Safeguarding is effective.

The well-being of children and their families is at the heart of the school. Leaders and staff work closely together to ensure that all children thrive and flourish. There is a strong commitment from all at the school to ensure that children are cared for. For example, staff attend specific training so that medical needs are understood and, consequently, managed extremely well.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They know who to talk to if they are worried or anxious about anything. Highly effective policies and procedures are fit for purpose and ensure that any concern is acted upon swiftly and the right support provided. The designated safeguarding leaders work closely and sensitively with parents, challenging them, where necessary, to ensure that children are safe from harm.

Governors are knowledgeable about safeguarding and understand their responsibilities for keeping children safe. They check that systems, such as those for the safer recruitment of staff, are followed appropriately.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I looked at what leaders were doing to raise standards in writing, especially for boys and the most able pupils. Over the last few years, while the proportion of pupils who reach expected standards is similar to that found nationally, the proportion of pupils reaching greater depth has been much lower. Leaders identified this as an area of concern themselves and included it as a priority on the school development plan. A new approach was introduced to the teaching of writing. Teachers ensure that pupils have opportunities to write in a range of genres, including poems, letters, instructions and not just stories. As a result, boys are highly engaged in their writing and making better progress.
- Expectations of what pupils can do are higher. Teachers encourage pupils to write in detail. Pupils rise to the challenge of finding alternative words or phrases to make their work more interesting. The introduction of a joined style of writing from an early age is helping pupils write more fluently. By the end of Year 2, many pupils have a well-developed style of writing. They present their work neatly and to a high standard. As a result of this focus on developing writing, more pupils are reaching higher standards. In 2016, only 1% of pupils reached greater depth. This rose to 13% in 2017 and most recently, in 2018, 20% of pupils reached the higher standard.
- The school has a significant number of pupils with additional needs such as complex medical issues or special educational needs (SEN), including communication, speech and language delay and social and emotional difficulties. I wanted to explore how these pupils are supported to make progress and reach the standards of which they are capable. The school is highly inclusive. Pupils and staff demonstrate patience, understanding and empathy for those around

them. Leaders meet with parents to discuss their child's specific needs. Staff are deployed effectively to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils. Appropriate and relevant training is provided to help adults know how to support individual children. As a result, leaders ensure that effective provision is in place from the start so that pupils make progress.

- The leadership of SEN is highly effective. An experienced, knowledgeable and dedicated SENCo keeps a close eye on the progress of those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Pupils who struggle are identified quickly. They are given the help they need individually or in small groups. High-quality support in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics helps pupils make better progress. Some teachers provide 'booster catch-up' support immediately a child begins to struggle. This is preventing some pupils from falling behind. Leaders are keen to ensure that this approach is more consistently in place across the school.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have introduced a new curriculum. It has been chosen deliberately to engage and interest pupils of all ages. To overcome initial reluctance from some staff, leaders worked tirelessly with the staff team to demonstrate the benefits of change. Over time, a rich curriculum has evolved, which pupils talk enthusiastically about. Even the very youngest children talk with excitement and link their heart paintings with their current topic, 'Why do you love me?' Long-standing members of staff comment positively about the curriculum; they feel reinvigorated by the changes.
- Leaders ensure that a wide range of first-hand experiences are used to bring the curriculum alive. Pupils go on visits such as those to Tamworth Castle and an overnight residential. Visits to the school, such as one from a local veterinary nurse, are regularly built into the curriculum. Pupils participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities such as cookery, rugby, art and craft, Spanish and playing the ukulele. As a result, pupils develop skills, knowledge and understanding across a wide range of subjects.
- Over the course of a year, pupils participate in eight enrichment days. Working in mixed-age groups, pupils work on a common activity such as photography, nature watch, map reading and drama. Through this work, pupils develop social skills, confidence and friendships across the school. The opportunity to use the junior school facilities for the 'making a smoothie' activity helps reduce the fear factor of moving on to key stage 2.
- The final aspect of school that I looked at in detail was the process of transition from home into school and then on to junior school. Leaders plan carefully for each move, ensuring that children feel safe, secure and prepared. Stay and play sessions help the youngest children settle and become familiar with their new surroundings. Information-sharing with parents is a two-way process. Staff view parental involvement as vital in this process. Parents spoke very positively about how well prepared their children were when they started school. They commented on how quickly their children settle and the progress they make.
- The move from Reception into key stage 1 is viewed as equally important. Leaders ensure that sufficient time is given to this process. Pupils from Year 1 visit the Reception classes. They share a picture book they have created and answer questions. Current Year 1 pupils said that they felt confident moving

classes because of the things they had found out. Consequently, there is little lost learning from one year to the next. The books of current pupils show strong progress already, as a result of pupils being settled in their new class.

- Leaders continue to develop and deepen the links with the local junior school. Staff work together to moderate pupils' work and share information. Pupils regularly visit the junior school, and participate in different events and activities. The secondment of a Year 2 teacher to the junior school enhanced the transition of pupils moving into key stage 2. The proactive approach taken by leaders ensures that pupils of every age are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to raise expectations of what pupils can do, so that more pupils, particularly the very youngest children, make better than expected progress across the curriculum
- the skills of middle leaders continue to be developed so that they have a greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning across the school
- all adults ensure that pupils of all ages develop greater independence by providing opportunities for pupils to do things for themselves.

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

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the headteacher was absent through a long-term illness. I held discussions with leaders about the significant changes to the school since the last inspection, the school's self-evaluation and areas for further development. I shared my key lines of enquiry with the acting headteacher. We discussed information about children's current progress and attainment. I met with members of the governing body, including the chair. I considered the 22 responses to the staff questionnaire. I carried out learning walks with senior leaders and spoke to pupils. I looked at a selection of pupils' work books. I met with parents before school started and considered the 103 responses to Ofsted's Parent View and text service. I reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to the school's arrangements for keeping children safe.