

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



6 November 2018

Mr Phil Turner
Headteacher
Birchfield Primary School
Birchfield Avenue
Gildersome
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS27 7HU

Dear Mr Turner

Short inspection of Birchfield Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 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 under your leadership in December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your supportive leadership has inspired staff to continually develop professionally and secure promotion. Morale is high. You have built a caring team that ensures that pupils feel safe and happy. One parent, whose child recently started school in Reception, told me, 'She's so excited to get into school now that we don't even get a kiss.' Pupils told me that they enjoy coming to school, resulting in attendance rates that are above average. Teachers enrich learning with visits to exciting places and by inviting visitors into school. For example, Year 6 had taken part in a Shakespeare production the night before the inspection and Year 5 enjoyed a performance from a visiting theatre company on the day of my visit. This wider knowledge and cultural experience brought texts to life and stimulated great ideas for pupils' writing. Your community appreciates the loyal and dedicated service you give to the school.

During the last inspection, two areas were identified for improvement. One was to improve the quality of teaching so that standards of attainment are higher at key stage 1. Key stage 1 results were disappointing in 2017, but your 2018 results were much better in reading and mathematics. Key stage 1 results remain low in writing. Leaders know that key stage 1 results need to improve in all subjects at the higher standard. We worked together during the inspection to look at the quality of pupils' writing, including how well pupils are being challenged to reach the higher standard.

At the time of the last inspection, you were also asked to improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that middle leaders have a fuller role in improving the quality of teaching. Your recently appointed middle leaders have quickly risen to the challenge of their new responsibilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established a strong culture of safeguarding in your school. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff at all levels were able to answer my questions about child protection arrangements and their role in this important aspect of work. Governors were able to tell me about their safeguarding training. Pupils who have medical needs are very well cared for. One parent told me about the extra help the school gives to meet his child's additional medical needs. Another parent, using Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, described the school working successfully with nursing and occupational health care teams in order to learn about a complex medical condition. The before- and after-school club staff use individual health care plans so that pupils can be kept equally safe there. I talked to pupils on the playground over lunchtime and they told me that they feel safe at school. Pupils were also able to explain how they stay safe online. I saw effective record-keeping and examples of extra help that had been given to some pupils and families.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception improved in 2018 after two years of being below the national average. Adults and children in Reception have good relationships. We saw good teaching of phonics and children who were enjoying singing their letters and sounds. Less formal times of the day were not as successful. Child-initiated activities are not planned and resourced well enough to ensure that children make equally strong progress when they are working independently.
- Too few children in Reception have the opportunity to practise their early writing skills. We looked at examples of the children's writing over time. We also looked at some of the most able children's work that they had produced when they were in your Nursery. We agreed that, from these high starting points, children do not have enough challenge to improve their writing and make strong progress. Middle leaders told me that the school settles children into Reception during the autumn term and increases expectations of them in the spring term. When we looked closely at the most recent assessments, we agreed that children, especially the most able, are ready for a higher level of challenge now.
- Key stage 1 reading results improved in 2018 and we saw good phonics teaching in Year 1. Pupils' reading books are well matched to their phonics knowledge, allowing them to read with accuracy and success. I heard several key stage 1 pupils read and I saw them apply their decoding skills well. In contrast, key stage 1 pupils' attainment in writing has been consistently low for the last three years. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation and use exciting ideas for writing, but there are few opportunities for pupils to apply all of these skills to longer pieces of writing.

- Middle leaders looked at pupils' English books with me. We considered the progress from Reception children's writing all the way through to Year 6. Middle leaders told me that they have identified that considerable focus on the teaching of grammar and spelling has limited the opportunities pupils have to write at length. We saw evidence of this in pupils' work. Leaders know that pupils need more opportunities to practise their skills independently so that they develop the flair and creativity needed to reach higher standards.
- During the inspection, I wanted to see how well the most able pupils are supported in their learning. This is because a lower than national proportion of pupils reach higher standards by the end of key stages 1 and 2, with the exception of reading in Year 6. Evidence in lessons, in pupils' work and in school assessment information demonstrates that there is still more work to be done to ensure that the most able pupils make good progress and achieve higher standards of attainment in mathematics and writing. You are aware of this and have relevant actions in place to address this issue.
- Middle leaders have been in their new roles since September and they have quickly evaluated what they need to do. Governors have also correctly identified the right priorities for improvement. I noticed that these ongoing areas for development are already in your current school improvement plan.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the use of assessment is sharper in the early years so that teaching, especially during child-initiated activities, is more focused and allows children to make greater progress
- sufficient opportunities are given for pupils, in all key stages, to develop writing stamina and the flair needed for more pupils to reach the greater depth standard of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracey Ralph
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you, or your deputy headteacher, and I observed lessons together in Reception, key stage 1 and Year 6. Pupils' work from across the school was scrutinised alongside senior leaders. We also considered children's records of achievement, known as 'learning journeys', from the early years. At leaders' request, Reception children's work from the previous academic year was also reviewed. Meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the Reception teacher, the designated safeguarding lead, the chair of governors, the governor with responsibility for teaching and learning, administrative staff and lunchtime staff. Various documents were evaluated, including the school improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation document, governors' meeting minutes and the school's monitoring records. I met with pupils in lessons and on the playground. I also listened to several pupils read. Safeguarding documents were reviewed, including some case files and individual health care plans. The responses to Ofsted's questionnaires from five staff and 23 pupils were considered. The 33 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, were also taken into account along with comments made personally to me by several parents bringing their children to school at the start of the day.