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23 November 2018

Mr Andrew Kann
Headteacher
Castlefield School
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Dear Mr Kann

Short inspection of Castlefield School

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2018 with Christopher Crouch, 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 good in January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your school is a nurturing community. Parents are very positive. They say that their children make good progress because staff are so committed.

Since the previous inspection there have been a significant number of staff changes. Nearly three quarters of your teaching staff are new. You have worked hard to ensure that all work together as part of a cohesive team. Staff have the highest ambitions for the pupils. They share your vision and drive to improve.

Staff are keen to use the latest research in education to further improve their skills. They recognise the importance of collaborative working, such as with the Cressex Liaison Group. They appreciate the opportunity to share best practice with representatives from other schools, such as in the checking of pupils' work.

Your school has undergone some building works since the last inspection. You now have a large purpose-built Nursery. The accommodation is colourful and well designed. It provides a warm and welcoming environment for children.

An area for improvement at the last inspection related to middle leaders. This is because they were not accountable enough for improving pupils' progress. You acted swiftly to address this issue. Middle leaders now have a much more positive impact on improving progress. They check pupils' learning carefully and ensure that

any misconceptions are rectified quickly. Middle leaders are well trained and many are very experienced. Some have become specialist leaders of education, such as in English. The last inspection identified that the attendance of some pupils needed to improve. You now follow up absences carefully. As a result, attendance is similar to the national average.

During a learning walk, inspectors visited the Reception classes. We found that teachers do not always check children's starting points well enough when they start in Reception. We also found that teachers do not always plan carefully enough for children's next steps in learning. Equally, in mathematics in key stage 1 we found limited examples of pupils developing their problem-solving skills. The most able pupils were not always given challenging enough work to deepen their understanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff who answered the questionnaire consider that children are safe at this school. Parents are also positive about the welfare and safety of their children.

Pupils say that they feel safe and secure. They feel confident to talk to members of staff if they ever have any concerns.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policies and procedures for keeping children safe are threaded through all aspects of school life. Staff take good care of the pupils; their well-being is central to the school's caring ethos. Staff receive high-quality training and understand their responsibilities well. They are able to identify vulnerable pupils, such as those who are at risk of neglect. Your school works well with a range of external agencies.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection we agreed to check the impact of leadership and management on the school. We found that you have built upon the strengths identified at the previous inspection. You have driven forward a distributive style of leadership. This has ensured that all staff can make a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
- You and your leadership team are passionate about helping pupils to achieve their full potential. Strategies that you have introduced are having a positive impact. For example, pupils now have strong phonics skills.
- We considered how well pupils progress at your school. We found that in key stage 2 your school has much to be proud of. Pupils make good progress, and often very good progress. For the last two years pupils have attained better than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In 2018 attainment in key stage 1 was lower than the national average. You and your staff have acted to rectify this issue. Current pupils are now making stronger progress, particularly in their reading and writing. But in mathematics the most able pupils do not always have work that is challenging enough for them to make

strong progress. There are also not enough opportunities for all pupils to develop their problem-solving skills.

- We agreed to check how well children in the early years were progressing. This is because the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has been well below the national average for the last two years. We found that the early years provides a safe and stimulating environment. This has a positive impact on children's personal and social development. Children behave well. They listen carefully to their teacher's instructions. However, staff do not always assess and record children's skills and abilities carefully when they start in Reception. Staff do not always plan well enough for children's next steps in learning. This has an impact on the amount of progress children make.
- The impact of the curriculum on pupils' academic and personal development was a key line of enquiry. We found that the curriculum is well planned. It gives pupils a range of diverse experiences, such as in using virtual reality headsets. Pupils say the headsets 'give us amazing experiences such as when we explored the African desert'.
- We found that pupils have high aspirations. This is because your school has helped pupils understand 'how to achieve what they want to achieve'. Pupils know the qualifications they need for various jobs. They also understand the procedures for applying for a job. Many know that the skills they learn in some jobs can be transferred to other jobs. As a result, your pupils are not only well prepared for the next stage of their education they are also well prepared for their future lives.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff assess and record children's skills and abilities carefully when they enter Reception and then use this information to plan children's next steps in learning
- in mathematics in key stage 1, pupils have more chances to develop their problem-solving skills and that the most able are given more challenging work to deepen their understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Bowes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and members of your senior leadership team. There was a telephone call with your chair of the governing body and also a conference call with three other governors. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority. Discussions were held with pupils regarding what it was like to attend this school. We spoke to a few parents at the start of the school day and took into consideration 13 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. The 26 responses to the staff survey were also considered. We visited all the classes and looked at pupils' books. A range of school documentation was checked, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for further improvement; assessment; the single central record of pre-employment checks; policies and procedures and minutes of governors' meetings.