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21 January 2019

Mrs Catherine Young
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Dear Mrs Young

Short inspection of St Leonard's CofE (A) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2019, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You were appointed following a turbulent time for the school. Senior leaders, including the headteacher and chair of governors, left the school. Outcomes for pupils had fallen to well below national averages and the quality of education provided declined significantly. You swiftly dealt with the issues facing the school, creating a strong, stable staff team supported by highly effective governors. You empower staff to take the lead and ensure that, despite the school being smaller than average, responsibilities are shared and a range of staff lead improvements. There is evidence of a deep commitment to the shared vision. Now, as a result of strong, determined leadership at all levels, children continue to flourish and achieve extremely well academically.

A full complement of skilled, knowledgeable governors is now in place. The governing body is led by an extremely skilled, experienced chair of governors, who provides clarity and leads from the front. He ensures that governors provide a highly effective challenge not only to school leaders but to themselves. Governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and issues facing the school.

Through a full range of governor visits, they see for themselves what is working well and where rapid improvements have had a positive impact on standards. Governance has improved significantly and is a strength of the school.

The leadership of teaching is excellent. Your checks on the quality of teaching are thorough and you provide detailed guidance and feedback to help teachers get the best from pupils. Pupils comment on the way in which teachers make learning fun. They appreciate the revised curriculum, which provides new and interesting topics that they thoroughly enjoy. Parents and carers also recognise the improvements made in the quality of education provided in the school. They are grateful for the enriching experiences that help their children develop deep knowledge and understanding in a wide range of subjects.

Staff know the pupils extremely well. They plan suitably challenging activities, which are tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils. Staff take every opportunity to develop pupils' skills and deepen their understanding. They use questions skilfully to enable pupils to think for themselves. Expectations of what pupils can do and achieve have been raised significantly. This is now the norm across the school. Work in the books of current pupils shows how pupils strive and are supported effectively to reach the very highest standards. High-quality work can be found across the curriculum. The quality of teaching across the school has gone from strength to strength.

Your analysis of achievement data is meticulous. Working with staff, you use the analysis and evaluation of individual pupils' progress carefully to plan suitable next steps to raise achievement. For example, the proportion of pupils reaching greater depth in writing was identified as an area for improvement. As a result of additional writing opportunities being provided through the revised curriculum, more pupils across the school are now writing fluently and reaching greater depth. Progress in reading has steadily improved from well below national averages to being significantly above. The school is no longer in the bottom 20% of schools nationally. However, there is still more to be done to ensure that more pupils achieve at the highest levels.

Pupils have well-developed, positive attitudes to learning. They are curious and express delight in being challenged in their work. Pupils are aspirational. Those I spoke to wanted to be lawyers, teachers or veterinary surgeons. They recognise the way in which teachers help them, stating: 'Teachers shine a light on what is possible and show us the way. If you want success you have to start early.' Pupils work well together, and there is strong evidence of mature, respectful relationships across the school. As a result of the school's very strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, pupils' understanding of British values is exceptionally well developed. Behaviour and conduct during the inspection were of the highest standard.

The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been realised. Teacher feedback, not only in mathematics but in all curriculum areas, is highly effective in moving pupils' learning on. Pupils enjoy responding and take responsibility for improving their own work in 'fix-it' time. You identified additional

issues in the Nursery and Reception classes, which continue to be worked on and which were explored further during the inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the team ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Comprehensive systems are in place for recruitment. Thorough checks are undertaken to ensure that all staff are safe to work with children. Governors regularly check that procedures are followed appropriately. Staff and governors receive regular training and fully understand their responsibilities for keeping children safe at school. This ensures that they are aware of and can apply the latest guidance and thinking in their daily work. They have a good understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and can recognise the potential signs of radicalisation, child abuse or neglect. There is a strong culture of vigilance among all staff.

Record-keeping is high quality, with a comprehensive chronology, building up a picture of concerns over time. Designated safeguarding leads work closely with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable children and their families receive timely support. Several parents commented on the excellent support they and their children receive, saying that leaders 'simply could not have done more for them'.

Through the school ethos and curriculum, pupils learn to keep themselves safe. They have an extensive understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet or a mobile phone. Pupils accept the need for the new security fencing around the school and trust adults at school to keep them safe and help with any worries they may have.

Inspection findings

- The early years foundation stage, identified by senior leaders as a main area for improvement, has been transformed. The learning area has been refurbished and an effective curriculum is in place. A new, skilled and knowledgeable teacher, well supported by leaders, is establishing a firm foundation on which to build. The majority of children enter the school with skills that are typical for their age. Accurate assessment on entry quickly identifies those who need additional help and support to reach a good level of development. Children are supported effectively, although some modelling by adults, particularly of the cursive handwriting, is not always high quality.
- The engaging curriculum ensures that children are highly engrossed in their learning. They share their ideas with each other, and adults skilfully help them build links with what they already know. Learning journals capture the extremely strong progress being made, especially by those who are more able. They display confidence in their ability to write detailed accounts, for example in their own 'Rainbow Fish' story books. Children use capital letters, finger spaces and their sounds to spell words independently. Higher expectations of what pupils can do and achieve are evident from all members of staff. However, there is still room for further improvement to ensure that even more children, given their starting points, meet and exceed the early learning goals.

- Leaders' strategies to improve the teaching of phonics have been successful. High-quality training and clear expectations ensure that both teachers and support staff use a consistent approach. The introduction of a phonic tracker enables pupils' progress to be checked more closely. Pupils at risk of falling behind catch up quickly due to highly effective targeted support. Consequently, standards in phonics have risen sharply and there is strong evidence of pupils confidently using their phonics skills when reading and writing independently.
- Leaders at all levels make a strong contribution to the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school and across the curriculum. Clear job descriptions set out exactly what is expected from each member of staff. Mentoring and coaching provided by senior leaders helps teachers reflect on their practice and hone their skills. Regular opportunities to participate in local teaching networks enable staff to share good practice.
- You have empowered and developed the skills of middle leaders. They now play a full part in the school's monitoring and evaluation process. They know what is expected because you have worked closely with them. Following focused opportunities for their own professional development, they provide training for staff. Effective practice is shared and built on. They display confidence in their roles and take the lead in further improvements.
- The proportion of pupils reaching greater depth has increased steadily over time and is now above national averages, especially in reading, writing and English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Reading materials used across the school provide a good level of challenge for all pupils. Very effective questioning and progressively challenging activities, accompanied by highly effective guidance, enable pupils to have the confidence to push themselves and reach higher standards.
- Previous poor attendance has been dealt with effectively by changing the culture across the school. Clear policies and procedures to manage attendance are now in place. No holidays in term time are authorised and leaders are tenacious in following up attendance below 95%. Specific plans are used effectively to improve the attendance of a small number of pupils who are persistently absent. These pupils are now attending more regularly and making strong progress in their reading, writing and mathematics as a result. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen significantly. Attendance has improved and is now above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the rapid improvements made are sustained and built on so that pupils' outcomes continue to rise, especially in writing at greater depth
- more children meet and exceed expectations in key areas of learning by the end of the early years foundation stage, so that they are even better prepared for key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and other leaders. I spoke to the chair of governors on the telephone and met with another governor. I also spoke to a representative from the Diocesan Board of Education on the telephone. I scrutinised a variety of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety. I checked documents relating to safeguarding and looked at published information on the school's website.

Accompanied by you, I made short visits to all classrooms and spoke to pupils informally. I met a group of pupils to talk about their learning more formally. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. I scrutinised their work books. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I considered 78 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 18 free-text comments. I also considered the 15 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the 23 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.