

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



7 March 2019

Mrs Vicky Pierce
Headteacher
Fairfield Primary School
Peelhouse Lane
Widnes
Cheshire
WA8 6TH

Dear Mrs Pierce

Short inspection of Fairfield Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 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 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. Prior to your appointment in September 2017, there had been a steep decline in the progress and attainment of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics, which left staff feeling demotivated and without direction. Since then, your leadership has inspired them to bring about rapid changes in the quality of teaching and learning. You have achieved this by establishing a team of knowledgeable senior leaders who have ensured that teachers have a better understanding of the standards pupils should achieve in each year group. You have also matched teachers' skills closely to the ages that they teach. Teachers now have higher expectations of their pupils to ensure that teaching is effective across years and subjects. Staff appreciate the opportunities that they have had for developing their skills. All staff responding to Ofsted's survey feel proud to be part of the school because leaders are investing in their development.

Previously, the impact of actions taken to address the areas for improvement left at the last inspection stalled, partly due to the effects of extensive building work and high numbers of temporary staff covering extended leave. You have ensured greater stability in staffing and have paid greater attention to the issues raised at the last inspection. There have been effective improvements to ensure that tasks are now better matched to pupils' needs. You have also taken effective action to improve subject leadership. Teachers lead on subjects that match their expertise. As a result, the structure of the curriculum is more consistent and has a sharper focus on raising pupils' outcomes. Success is evident in the high rates of progress at the end of key stage 2 in reading and mathematics in 2018. Writing also improved

to be in line with the national average. Similarly, in key stage 1 there was a marked improvement in pupils' attainment in 2018 to be broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. These strengths are also reflected in the good progress made by current pupils, as demonstrated by the work that I saw as part of this inspection.

Governors are knowledgeable and have an informed view about the actions that have been taken to improve the school. They question effectively in meetings to challenge leaders and have played an important role in promoting the positive changes at the school.

However, your leadership has been about much more than improving academic performance. The large majority of parents and carers that responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, have recognised the transformation in the atmosphere in the school. They appreciate the improvements that have taken place under your leadership and they comment on the way in which pupils are treated as individuals. This has been achieved through leaders' focus on establishing a culture of nurture in the school. Staff work tirelessly to support pupils' personal development and behaviour throughout the school. For example, the school's family workers have been effective in improving attendance and reducing the amount of persistent absence. The pupils that I spoke to were also positive about the ethos within the school. Their classrooms are bright and welcoming. Displays celebrate pupils' work to promote ownership and self-esteem. Pupils understand what it means to be a successful learner and they are keen to learn. The pupils with whom I spoke were thoughtful, articulate and humorous. They are a credit to staff and parents alike.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of nurture that you have established places safeguarding as the highest priority within the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are trained annually and receive regular updates. They are vigilant and knowledgeable about the local risks to pupils. The safeguarding leader is supported well by two dedicated family workers who work together to ensure that pupils are safe from harm. The family workers know pupils and parents well. They ensure that early help is offered to families experiencing difficulties to prevent concerns from escalating.

The pupils I spoke to as part of the inspection say that they feel safe. They say that this is because adults are approachable and that they feel confident to share their worries. Pupils display a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They are active in ensuring that pupils stay safe from the effects of bullying by contributing to a safeguarding council for pupils. They say that bullying in school is rare because staff deal with behaviour well before it gets worse.

Inspection findings

- This inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first was to look at how effectively leaders support disadvantaged pupils to acquire early language

skills in the Reception Year and in Year 1. Plans for the use of the pupil premium are targeted correctly at improving pupils' learning. In the early years, leaders have established a rich environment where children regularly enjoy stories and have a wide range of opportunities to write. This has been successful in motivating boys to write. For example, children opt to write stories and use their phonic skills to sound out new words when writing a story independently. The work of disadvantaged children shows that they make good progress in the acquisition of language skills to read and write well in their Reception Year to ensure that they are ready to build on this in Year 1.

- The early years leader and the English leader have ensured that changes to the grouping of pupils in phonics has been more precise in matching teaching to pupils' next steps. This has aided the move of pupils from Reception into Year 1. The pupil premium has been used to provide staff with specialist training to develop pupils' speech and language, which is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. The pupil premium is also being used to provide further additional support for disadvantaged pupils to enhance their phonics skills when reading. This has been achieved through a wider range of opportunities to consolidate their work. Pupils' work demonstrates good progress in the application of phonic skills when writing. This shows that disadvantaged pupils make good progress in learning phonics and in reading.
- The second key line of enquiry looked at how effectively pupils in Year 4 and Year 5 are challenged to achieve the highest standards in writing. The work in pupils' writing books shows good progress. Middle- and higher-ability pupils have overcome the weaknesses in their writing which were an issue at the end of Year 2. This has been brought about by ensuring that pupils understand and recall their learning so that skills are secured well. Teachers encourage pupils to share their thinking and justify the reasons behind the choices that they make in their work. This has helped pupils to write in logical sentences so that their writing matches the requirements of the national curriculum for their age. However, the level of challenge for some of the most able pupils in Years 4 and 5 is variable, particularly in the quality of their descriptive language. This hampers their progress towards reaching the highest standards.
- Finally, we looked at how effectively leaders are addressing pupils' social and emotional mental health (SEMH) to ensure that they are ready to learn, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Ofsted's SEND inspection of Halton authority in May 2017 highlighted a sharp increase in the proportion of children and young people with SEMH issues and school leaders have acted upon this well to support pupils at the school. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has led the recent establishment of a nurture provision that is ensuring that pupils are ready to learn. The provision mainly supports pupils with SEND each morning, according to pupils' needs. They appreciate the opportunities that they have to start their day in a calm way and to have space and time to do so. They are taught in smaller groups by well-trained staff who care for their needs effectively. Pupils speak highly of the support that they receive. The work of these pupils clearly demonstrates good progress towards the targets that are set for their learning when they are provided with this additional support. However, for some pupils with SEND this

success is not yet translating into their class work because the expectations for these pupils are not consistently high enough. The SENCo has identified this and has put in place short, sharp sessions in class to ensure that pupils with SEND regularly practise basic skills. Initiatives are at an early stage and the effect of these actions on pupils' progress is only just emerging.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- some of the most able pupils are challenged further in their writing, paying particular attention to developing the quality and use of description
- there are higher expectations for pupils with SEND to transfer the skills that they develop with additional support into the quality of their independent work in class.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and governors to discuss safeguarding and aspects of school leadership and management. I visited classes to observe teaching and learning, which included the teaching of phonics, and I analysed pupils' writing work from these classes. I spoke to pupils informally during lessons about their work and with a group of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils about their experiences at the school. I heard pupils from Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 read individually, as well as hearing pupils read as part of their classroom activities. I reviewed safeguarding documentation, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff and reviewed safeguarding arrangements. I also reviewed documentation including the school's development plans and the minutes of governors' meetings. I took into account 32 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 31 responses to the staff survey and six responses to the pupil survey.